THE MAN FROM U.N.C.L.E.

MAGAZINE

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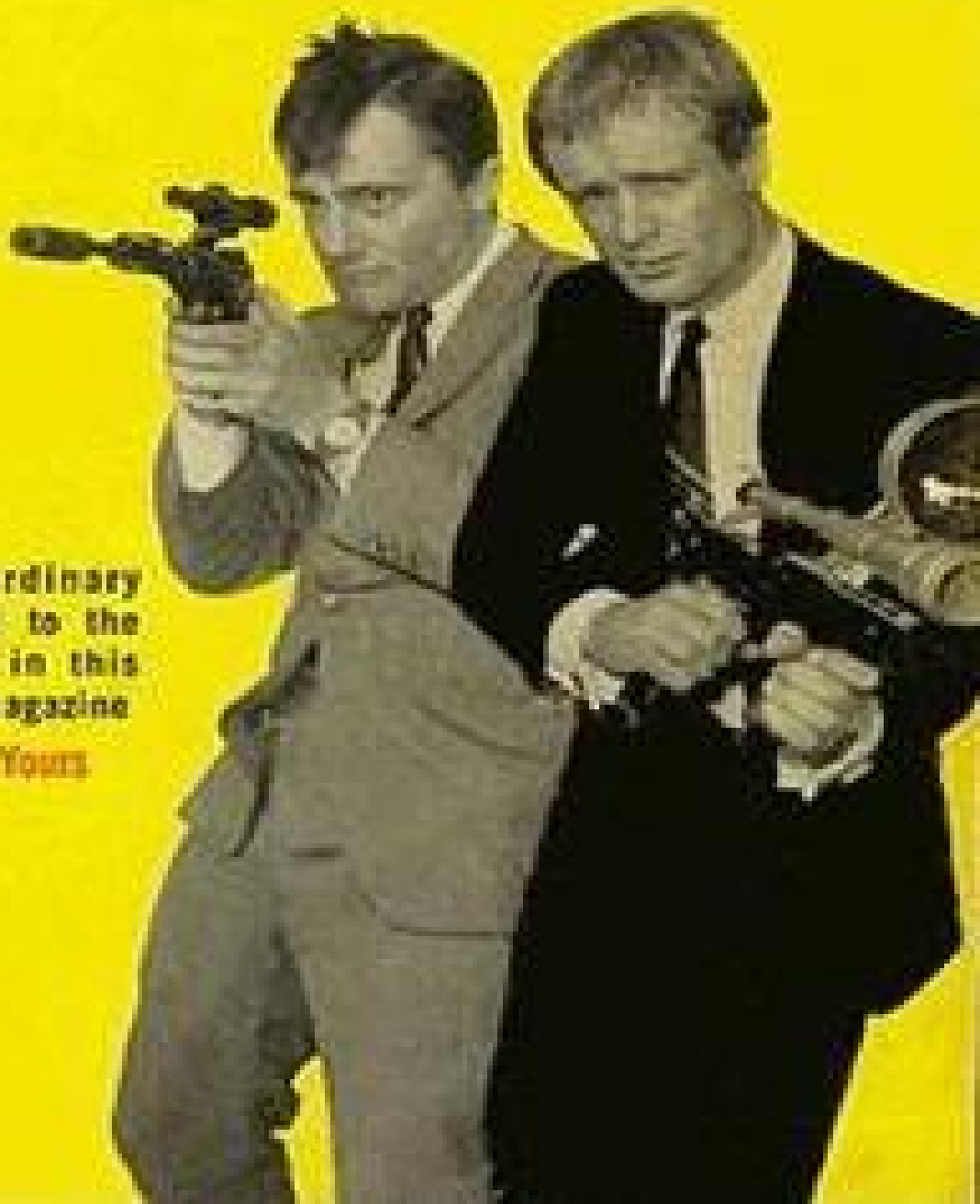
NAPOLEON SOLO ILLYA KURYAKIN



THE HOWLING TEENAGERS AFFAIR

First of Their Extraordinary Adventures — Dedicated to the Destruction of Evil — in this NEW spy and suspense magazine

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The Howling Teenagers Affair

By Dennis Lynds

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Illya Kuryakin and Napoleon Solo had one last day to find and destroy THRUSH's new deadliest weapon—an army of mindless monsters who killed with a smile—and died laughing!

ACT I: THE MADNESS METHOD
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ACT I: THE MADNESS METHOD

Violent death hung in the morning air. It rose with the mist over the great river that flowed past the shining white new city. The rumble in the distance grew louder, a sound like an express train moving closer. The police and thin line of British-uniformed, American-armed troops were in their places around the perimeter of the airfield, at the edge of the city in the morning sun.

The twin-engined aircraft circled the field once and prepared for the landing. The distant rumble grew closer. The gently descending aircraft touched down. The morning mist began to burn off.

The police and soldiers lounged easily in their thin line, joked, pointed toward the approaching rumble that shook the ground, and laughed. They were not worried. This was Africa. The new Africa, but still Africa. The Zulus of Tchaka had roamed across this land, beating their assegais against their shields to frighten the enemy before they ever appeared to do battle with them.

The approaching mob was doing the same thing, and the police and soldiers were not frightened. They had been through this before. Only as a formality they held their weapons ready as the first of the mob advanced along the road from the city.

The twin-engined aircraft rolled to a stop and the door opened. A massive, broad-shouldered man stepped out and stood at the head of the movable stairs. His white teeth flashed in the morning sun. He was taller than the nervous men around him, like some great Zulu chief himself.

At the edge of the field the first wave of the mob made contact with the police and troops. The police and troops held them back, smiling but striking out with clubs and gun butts where necessary. The troops and police smiled, because they had suddenly seen that the entire mob was made up of the young, the teenagers of this emerging new nation.

The tall, broad-shouldered man stepped down the movable stairway and reached the field itself. He started across, his bodyguards trotting to keep up with him.

“Vive le Presidente!” voices shouted.

Suddenly, the mob seemed twice its size. The police stopped smiling. The soldiers battled. Howling, the mob of teenagers smashed through the thin line of guards. Sirens wailed in the distance as reinforcements approached for the outmanned police.

The mob did not wait. Roaring like wild animals, screaming, hysterical, they poured over the line of guards.

Engulfed by the wave of suddenly distorted faces, the sea of wild eyes, the police and troops had no chance.

The teenagers swept across the open air field like the ancient Zulu warriors.

His bodyguards, everything forgotten now but the safety of their chief, fired their machine-guns directly into the advancing mob. The first wave of the roaring mob went down. Blood spurted across the earth of the field. Screams of pain filled the air. Legs and arms kicked, writhed on the ground.

But the mob did not stop, did not pause, did not hesitate even one split second.

The bodyguards fired again, held down the triggers, the barrels of their sub-machine guns turning red.

The mob swept on.

Like the great ocean itself the mob of howling teenagers rolled across the field.

And then the mob passed on toward the distant edge of the open field and the dark jungle.

Behind them they left thirty of their own dead; they left a hundred wounded and writhing. They left the bodyguards trampled and groaning, the police and troops dazed and wounded. They left the twin-engined aircraft leaning crazily on one smashed wing.

And they left the tall president lying on his face, dead, with a long knife plunged into his back.

* * *

The Palladium in London rocked to the screams of the teenagers. On the lighted platform stage four young men sang, twisted, strummed guitars, banged the drums. The young people screamed with delight. They laughed, clapped, sighed. Their bright young faces were excited with the beat of the music, the words of the singers. One tall boy, his hair streaming out behind him, dove from the balcony. His bloody head lay smashed against a seat below.

* * *

In Sydney, Australia, the police answered a call. Citizens complained that there was a noisy party disturbing the peace. When the police arrived in the rich suburb all was silent. Cautiously the police approached the house. Inside, in the basement playroom, they found the dead bodies of twenty-two teenagers.

“Poison?” the detective said. “All of them?”

“Every one. And self-inflicted without a doubt. They all have the glasses near them.”

“Mass suicide?” the detective said, unbelieving, staring.

* * *

The laboratory lay in burned smoldering ruins. Captain Parker of the Chicago police stood beside the director of the laboratory.

“They were picketing—nothing unusual,” the director said.

“They know we are working on military research. Peace groups often picket us.”

“Then they went wild?” the captain of Chicago police said.

“All at once, just before quitting time, the twenty of them became two hundred, perhaps three hundred. They broke into the building and set it on fire.”

“All teenagers? Every one?”

“All,” the director said. “And the plans for the nuclear fuse are gone.”

* * *

On a side street in the Soho section of London, a mob of young people blocked the path of an armored car. The driver and two guards got out to clear them off. The driver and both guards died later of multiple injuries from their beating. Two million dollars in gold bullion vanished.

* * *

The beach near Santa Barbara, California, was deserted when the sixteen boys and girls, all under eighteen years of age, walked into the sea and out of sight. They were never seen again.

“Like lemmings,” the highway patrol officer said. Bodies washed ashore all week.

* * *

In Red Square, Moscow, the police failed to hold back the horde of long-haired youths when the deputy chief of security of the Polish People’s Republic came to visit the tomb of Lenin. The police were reprimanded. The square was cleared by troops. Six of the teenagers died, and twenty went to prison. But the deputy chief of Security of the Polish People’s Republic was dead.

TWO

Napoleon Solo looked deep into her eyes. Violet eyes, like deep, liquid marbles, pools of beauty. She was curled like a kitten at the end of a long, soft couch. Solo's smile was easy, youthful as he looked into those violet eyes.

"How do you do it, Maxine?' Solo whispered into her ear. "Be almost six feet tall and curl up into a powder puff—such a pretty powder puff?"

"Mirrors," Maxine Trent whispered back. "I do it all with mirrors."

"Not all with mirrors, I hope." Solo said softly.

"All Napoleon Solo," she said. "I'm an illusion. I'm only a mirror myself. If you touch me, poof!"

Solo sighed. "The story of my life, poof!"

"Will you risk it? Touching me?" Maxine whispered.

"For you, I risk anything," Solo said.

"Go on! Go on!"

Solo leaned closer to her. The room—her room—was silent. The music that had been playing was gone now, the record player turning itself off automatically at just the right instant. Solo almost smiled; for his purposes he could not have done it better himself. A very cooperative record player.

Too cooperative?

The sixth sense, the warning, went off in his brain. The split-second sensitivity to danger, even to potential danger, that had kept him alive longer than any chief enforcement agent U.N.C.L.E. had ever had. Was it coincidence, the record player stopping at just the precise instant he was about to bend down and kiss her?

He leaned close to her, smiling, her perfume in his nostrils. His eyes looked into her eyes. Behind his boyish ardent smile, his mind went to work. He ran Maxine Trent through his mind like a card through a computer: Age 24; 5 foot 11 inches and all the right measurements to go

with the height; a runner-up for Miss America one year; daughter of industrialist Clark Trent; known to like action-and danger. Introduced to Solo two weeks ago by John Knox, a young business executive Solo cultivated to hide his true occupation.

His true occupation was chief enforcement agent for United Network Command for Law and Enforcement—U.N.C.L.E. And U.N.C.L.E. was a supra-national organization sworn to keep the world safe and, if possible, sane. Any enemy of any peaceful and honest person in the world was the enemy of U.N.C.L.E. It was hard work, dangerous work. Now Solo wondered if the danger were close here, in the arms of Maxine Trent.

“Well, Napoleon,” Maxine said. “I heard you were a man of action. Your certainly don’t call this action—yet?”

Solo smiled. “You’d be surprised, my dear.”

He was about to say more when the signal went off. A low sound, rising and falling, like a miniature version of the wailing horn of a Parisian police car. Solo reached quickly into the inside pocket of his coat and switched off the signal on the miniature radio set.

Maxine blinked up at him from the couch as he stood up.

“You’re not leaving—now?” she whispered.

“I’m afraid I am,” Solo said. “A previous appointment, my little alarm reminded me. Some other time we can pick it up, yes?”

She stared at him. He was a slender man of medium height. He was neither handsome nor ugly. A pleasant, friendly face that was usually smiling. His dark, brooding eyes were at the same time quick and bright. Intense eyes, but not hard and not jaded. Eyes that smiled an apology to Maxine now, yet were already seeing something else.

He turned quickly and walked to the door. The speed of the motion gave a slight indication of the strong, trained athlete’s body concealed in his slender frame. What he lacked in size, he more than made up for in catlike speed, in skill and in training. He seemed no different from the thousands of young executives, budding doctors, youthful professional men, and wealthy,

if idle, playboys. He could have been anything from a tennis bum to a first echelon government man.

Solo was none of those things. He was a man trained to kill with a single blow of his innocent-seeming hand.

Once in the corridor of Maxine Trent's apartment house, Solo turned quickly left and walked to the fire stairs. He went through the door and down and out into the midtown Manhattan street. It was late afternoon and the streets were crowded.

Solo walked a block, blended with the crowd. Only then did he take his small chrome metal and plastic sender-receiver set from out of his pocket.

He quickly raised the two threadlike antennae, pressed a button on the instrument that fitted in the palm of his hand, and spoke low into it.

"Solo here."

"Report to Mr. Waverly at once. Code Mayday," the crisp female voice of the radio communications girl said.

Solo clicked off his set, returned it to his pocket, and began to walk casually but quickly across town toward the East River and U.N.C.L.E. headquarters.

* * *

Illya Kuryakin ran his thin fingers through his thatch of unkempt blond hair. The small, thin Russian muttered to himself in Danish, which happened to be the language of the book he was intently puzzling over.

The private library was as quiet as a tomb. Kuryakin was one of the two persons in the small, book-lined room. The other was an old man whose clothes had seen better days, but whose thirst for knowledge was undiminished. From time to time, the ancient female librarian came into the room. She glared at Illya, who she obviously considered far too young to be a scholar.

Illya smiled disarmingly at the harridan. With his blond, round-bowl haircut he looked like a mischievous Russian leprechaun; or a blond knight-errant, an impish modern-day Prince Valiant with straw hair. His bright and quick eyes danced beneath his seriously lowered brow. His glance at the old

woman was quizzical and amused—an amusement that did not show on his face as he steadily looked up at her.

“Can I help you, madam?” Illya said to the librarian.

“I— I—” the woman stammered in confusion, caught staring at Illya.

Illya spoke softly. “I understand. You are wondering what so young a man is doing in a library on such a fine day?”

“I—”

Illya smiled. “You are wondering why I am studying so obscure a book about poisons? Your wonder am I a spy, since I obviously read a foreign language. Ah, that is suspect, eh? A young man who reads a foreign language must be a spy at least, nyet? Ah the young people today, such irresponsible animals, nicht wahr?”

“I—” the librarian blustered, and then turned scarlet as this wisp of a boy suddenly reached out and pinched her.

“Why, you—”

Illya laughed.

“Well!” the librarian snapped, turned and stalked off.

Illya smiled once more, and returned to his work. This library was one of his favorite places to spend an afternoon in New York. A private library devoted to strange, half-known poisons, mysteries of ancient witchcrafts and other superstitions, all the half-insane fears of the human mind. That was Illya’s single purpose in his life—to try to dispel the insanity of man, to try to save the idiot world from itself.

For that purpose he had studied, learned fifteen languages, left the service of the country of his birth to work for what he truly considered the only sane group of people on earth—U.N.C.L.E.—United Network Command for Law and Enforcement.

For that purpose, he still studied, trained his small but lithe body, devoted himself to the work. He had no interest in either command or position, only in doing the job better than anyone. He had no time for such rewards and frills of the world as money, honors, fine living, or creature comfort.

The signal on his transmitter-receiver went off. Instantly, Illya became the quick, serious agent of U.N.C.L.E. The old librarian was looking around in fury for the source of the strange wailing sound. Illya shut off the signal, raised the small plastic and metal box to his lips.

“Kuryakin here.”

“Mr. Waverly wants you at once. Code Mayday.” the voice of the communications girl said.

Illya replaced the tiny radio set in his pocket, returned his book to the desk, smiled winningly at the ancient librarian.

“Take very good care of the books, liebchen,” he hissed at the old woman.

He could almost hear her red-faced anger behind him as he walked out and down to the late afternoon New York street. Smiling to himself at his own joke, he did not see the old man in the decrepit clothes move with far greater speed than he should have been capable of at his age. He did not see the old man follow him.

But he heard the footsteps behind him on the stairs.

He reached the street and for an instant was out or sight of the footsteps behind him. He reached into his jacket pocket for the tiny radio, raised the threadlike antennae, pressed the sending button.

“Sonny, this is Bubba. I have a bandit in tow. Plan 9.”

Illya pressed his receive button. Instantly, the tiny transmitter-receiver whispered low to him.

“Bubba, from Sonny. Possible bandit here, too. Plan 9.”

The voice of Napoleon Solo faded. Illya walked on down the sunny street. In a store window he saw the figure of the old man behind him.

THREE

There is a brownstone house on East 44th Street in Manhattan. It seems an innocent dwelling, with a small printing shop on the ground floor. A narrow alley runs beside it. The alley is a dead-end, or seems so, ending one hundred feet back from the street in a high brick wall topped with broken glass.

Approximately fifteen minutes after their whispered words over the miniature radio sets, Napoleon Solo and Illya Kuryakin approached the East 44th Street brownstone from opposite directions. They seemed intent on their own business, paid no attention to each other, and walked without looking back.

They seemed to meet as strangers at the mouth of the alley beside this innocent brownstone with its print shop. They both turned into the alley, nodding politely to each other, and began to walk toward the blank high wall at the rear.

At this precise instant, the printing presses in the ground floor print shop began to operate. They were old presses, the windows of the pressroom were open, and the noise in the alley was deafening. Solo and Kuryakin walked on down the alley toward the blank wall as if oblivious to the shattering noise of the presses.

Behind them the old man from the private library jumped into the alley, a grim smile on his face as he heard the noise of the presses. The old man moved down the alley with a speed that proved he was far from old beneath his disguise. A heavy, wide-mouthed gun in his hand proved that he was not a scholar. He raised the gun, still grinning at the convenient noise of the presses that would hide any sound.

He never fired his strange gun.

The seemingly blank wall of the brownstone building opened abruptly. Two men stepped out. The pistols in their hands spat twice each, the noise totally covered by the sound of the printing presses.

The fake old man fell like a stone, his body stiff and rigid.

The two men who had shot him ran to him, picked him up and hustled him through the secret openings into the brownstone building. The wall closed.

Napoleon Solo and Illya Kuryakin walked on toward the rear wall.

The alley was silent except for the noise of the printing presses. There was not even a drop of blood on the stones to show that anything had happened. The ersatz old man who had followed Illya Kuryakin was not dead, merely paralyzed and sleeping from the effect of the darts fired from the special pistols of the two U.N.C.L.E. men of Section-V—Security and Personnel.

Solo and Illya continued to walk as if they had seen nothing until they reached the rear wall.

And vanished.

* * *

The beautiful woman lurked in the doorway of a building on East 45th Street. She watched as the young man came down the steps of another brownstone two doors up the street closer to the East River. She frowned. She had expected Napoleon Solo to be carrying something when he emerged.

Aware that the wail of his miniature radio had been a summons to U.N.C.L.E. headquarters, she had trailed him to the 44th Street brownstone. She had not gone up the alley; it was too convenient. Instead, she, Maxine Trent, had come around the block and been rewarded for her quick guessing by the appearance of Solo from another brownstone. But the U.N.C.L.E. agent was empty-handed.

Maxine stared at the figure of Solo. The handsome young man was walking east toward the river. She sighed to herself; Napoleon Solo was such a good-looking man; it was too bad that she would have to stop him now, and search him. He could easily be carrying what she wanted hidden somewhere on that slender but so nicely masculine body.

She left her refuge and followed down the street in the shadows of the buildings on the shaded side. She was proud of herself. U.N.C.L.E. was so proud of its security! Solo was sure no one could have followed to the building on 44th Street and from the building on 45th Street.

The handsome fool was walking openly, carelessly.

Maxine had to hurry and move closer as people began to pour out of an office at the end of the block. She passed another set of brownstone steps, still smiling but hurrying. She never saw the small blond man step out.

Illya caught her neck, pressed and caught her inert body in his arms as she collapsed. She made no sound, lay totally unconscious in his arms.

A policeman pushed through the crowd.

“I’m sorry, officer. My wife has these spells,” Illya said.

“She just passed out,” someone said.

“You need a doctor?” the policeman said helpfully.

“That’s an excellent idea,” Illya said. “If you wouldn’t mind holding her, I’ll find one at once.”

Illya handed the inert form of Maxine Trent to the arms of the policeman, smiled and walked away into the crowd. All the people looked at the nice young man with sympathy. Illya smiled sadly back at them as he turned the corner and vanished.

It was nearly twenty minutes before the policeman began to wonder about the nice young man.

* * *

There are four known entrances to the hidden complex of U.N.C.L.E headquarters in New York. A maze of steel and bomb proof concrete hides behind its innocent faade, which includes a tailor shop, the false offices of an international aid organization also called U.N.C.L.E., and a key-club type restaurant called The Mask Club. The stronghold has no stairs, only elevators, and has been penetrated only once. From that simple penetration, no one in the attacking force survived.

To those who know, the headquarters can also be entered by water from the river through secret tunnels. But the main entrance, used by all but the few who can never be seen going in, is Del Floria's tailor shop.

Del Floria himself is a tall, balding man in his fifties. He is a good tailor, but he is also one of the best and quickest shots with any of the many weapons he has hidden close.

Del Floria is the keeper of the gate. He has been this, a key man in Section-V of U.N.C.L.E., for a long time. To enter the headquarters an enemy must pass him. This has never been done. The one penetration was made through the river entrances. Del Floria knows every U.N.C.L.E. member by sight, the only man below Section-I who does. He knows their faces, and no more. To know more would be his death warrant. Now he smiled as he greeted two old customers.

"If you would step into the fitting rooms, gentlemen," Del Floria said, "we can start fitting you."

Solo and Kuryakin stepped through the curtain into the fitting room. Once inside, they waited a moment; then, on a signal from Del Floria that all was clear, they stepped into one of the many dressing rooms. They closed the curtain. The wall opened. They stepped through. The wall closed behind them.

They stood in the reception room of U.N.C.L.E.

The room was windowless, without doors of any kind. A pretty girl sat behind the reception desk. The controls on the desktop were unlabeled, unidentified. Only she knew which button did what, and the buttons were interchanged at irregular intervals. She looked like a receptionist in any office in the city. Her U.N.C.L.E. special was out of sight in its holster behind her back. She handed Solo and Illya their triangular identity badges.

Badges in place, they stepped toward a wall that opened miraculously. Without the badges there would now be a hundred alarms clanging, doors closing and sealing, armed men facing them from every angle. With the badges they walked straight ahead through doors that opened untouched, past doors that never would open without the proper signal. They walked on

floors of steel, between walls of steel, and there were no windows anywhere.

They rode up two floors in a silent elevator. They emerged into another steel corridor. Again doors opened and they reached the end door of the corridor. This door was unmarked, exactly as all the other doors. A plain steel door with no way to tell that it was in any way different. But it was. This was the heart of U.N.C.L.E. operations in New York. The office of the chief, the office of one of only five men who formed Section-I—Policy and Operations.

The door opened. Solo and Illya stepped inside. Alexander Waverly stood at an open window, absently tapping his empty pipe in his hand. Solo and Illya stood behind him. The chief, the member of Section-I, seemed to be trying to think of something he wanted to say.

“He—uh, seemed to know nothing,” Waverly said, without turning around. “The one who was following Mr. Kuryakin. They brought him around in Section-V but he could tell us nothing.”

“THRUSH?” Napoleon Solo said.

“Yes, of course, Mr.—uh—Solo. Of course,” Waverly said.

The head of U.N.C.L.E. in New York turned now. Alexander Waverly looked, Illya Kuryakin had once said, like an aristocratic bloodhound. Beneath a broad forehead and thinning but neat gray hair, bushy eyebrows stood out from a heavy brow. The eyes were sunken in deep sockets, heavily wrinkled at the corners, as if the man had spent many years squinting into the sun and wind of the world. Below the eyes, Waverly’s face drooped into a permanently serious expression. A face that never smiled, never frowned, never showed any expression but thought.

“And mine?” Solo said. “Maxine Trent?”

“She talked her way out of the hands of the law. She then eluded the Section-V man who followed her,” Waverly said. “An entirely different cup of tea, the Trent woman.”

Waverly seemed to be thinking of something a long time ago. It would have been hard for Solo or Illya to guess what it was. The background of

Alexander Waverly was shrouded in an obscure mist. Beyond a rumor of fifty years service in British and American Intelligence, the manner of a man who had been born an aristocrat, the speech of an Englishman who had lived in many lands other than England, there was nothing known.

Just a man over sixty who wore tweeds and liked pipes, who could barely recall the names of his own agents, and who seemed always in a vaguely bumbling haze. A minor official who should have retired years ago. A man who, when it counted, had a memory like an elephant, a brain as quick as a scorpion and equally dangerous, a composure that never ruffled, and the ability to command men. A man who was very alone.

“Well,” Waverly said. “I expect I sent for you gentlemen.”

“Something THRUSH apparently knows about already,” Illya said.

“We weren’t followed for nothing.”

“Yes,” Waverly said. “I dare say they know what I have to tell you. Not surprising. THRUSH Council members are well placed, as you know.”

“How would they know it would be Illya and myself you would use this time?” Solo said.

“I believe they would assume we would use our best men on something of this importance,” Waverly said. And Waverly nodded to himself, as if seeing the THRUSH council, his opponents in the perpetual chess game he played for the future of the world. “Yes, they would have learned we have been called in. They would properly try to stop us befor we started.”

“They appear to know more than we do,” Illya said dryly.

“Eh? Oh, yes, I imagine they do. We shall have to correct that now. You see, it appears that THRUSH has found a way to use, and perhaps destroy, the young people of the world.”

FOUR

They were seated around the circular briefing table with the moving top. Waverly had pressed the button on his desk; a panel had slid back on the wall, revealing the screen. Now Illya, Solo and Waverly were watching the gray screen. Somewhere far off inside the complex of steel rooms the head of Communications and Research in Section-III, the pretty and redheaded May Heatherly, operated the screen and the running commentary.

“This is the airfield at Kandaville, photographed a few minutes after the mob had gone. You will note the knife in the back of the president,” the crisp, yet very female voice of May Heatherly said.

Solo noted the knife in the back of the dead president of the new country. But a corner of his mind thought of the very alive, very pretty, May Heatherly. He sighed aloud. And smiled when he noted Waverly looking at him. His chief missed little-worse, understood him. Waverly knew precisely what Solo’s sigh meant, and disapproved, and yet—

Sometimes Napoleon Solo was sure that Alexander Waverly still appreciated the young ladies.

“This is the body of the boy in London, taken just after the Palladium was cleared,” the voice of May Heatherly went on.

Illya looked at the crushed head of the boy. His mind observed every detail. He frowned. There was nothing at all unusual, nothing he could see to go on. Just a dead boy of seventeen.

“This is the basement room in Sydney taken by the police when they arrived. There was no doubt of the verdict, mass suicide,” May Heatherly’s voice continued.

Solo and Illya looked at the twenty-two sprawled bodies, all smiling in death.

“Note the smiles,” Waverly said. “Quite unusual.”

In rapid succession the screen showed the burning laboratory in Chicago, the armored car and its dead guards in Soho, the beach near Santa Barbara, the dead deputy chief of security in Red Square. And there was more, much more. Waverly laid a report, tow copies on the table and swung the top until the copies were before Illya and Solo.

“The report is quite complete,” Waverly said. “At least forty-seven other comparable incidents within the last three months.”

Solo flipped through the report, scanning the acts and places.

“Teenagers are always rioting,” Solo said.

“Quite true,” Waverly said. “But there are some peculiarities. Miss—uh—Heatherly, will you run them again?”

The pictures flashed on the screen again one by one. Solo and Illya studied them intently in the silence of the office. They were horrible, sad. They were angering, wasteful.

“Note all the expressions of the teenagers, gentlemen, those who are in the pictures. You will notice the smiles, even on the dead. And observe the eyes-positively exhilarated, I should say.”

“Manic,” Illya said. “Almost insane.”

“No, I think not insane. Look carefully. They are happy,”

Waverly pointed out. “It has been my experience that teenagers who have committed some act of violence or vandalism are characteristically frightened or at least subdued afterwards. Their natural insecurity returns after the impetus if gone. But these young people are still happy.”

“Drugged?” Solo said.

“Not in the usual sense, I should say,” Waverly said. “But I suspect some form of artificial stimulant—a most peculiar kind.”

Illya leaned forward. “In what way, sir?”

Waverly did not answer at once. The older man patted at his tweed pockets as if searching for something. At last he pulled out a pipe. Then he began to look for his tobacco. He continued his search as he talked.

“Well, it leaves no trace of how it was administered. It also leaves no trace in the body. They ran autopsies on all the dead children. Finally, it seems to have unpredictable effects.”

“What do you mean exactly by unpredictable?” Illya said.

Waverly filled his pipe. “Possible I should have the pictures run again for you, gentlemen. But in the interest of saving time, let me point out that in some of these cases there seems to be considerable method to the madness. I should think you could see-”

“The murder of the president,” Illya said, “the stealing of the gold bullion, the burning of that laboratory, and the theft of the fuse plans, and-”

“And the killing of the deputy chief of security,” Solo finished.

“Very good, gentlemen, I see all your training is not lost,” Waverly said. “Yes, it is quire clear that in each of those cases random accident appears rather unlikely. Someone had much to gain in each instance. One such accident, yes. Two? Possible. Three, not really possible. Four, never.”

“Mathematically all but impossible,” Illya said. “Given the exact similarity of conditions-all teenage riots.”

“What about the Russians?” Solo said. “Each of those cases was in the West except the deputy chief of security, and he was a Pole. It could have been some sort of purge.”

Illya smiled. “Always ready to malign my poor countrymen.”

“Your ex-countrymen,” Solo pointed out.

Waverly cleared his throat, tapped out his never lighted pipe.

“Let me say it is not the Russians. Our friends at the Kremlin are not cooperative with information, as you well know, but in this case we have reliable data to show that other such incidents have occurred in the Soviet. They are, I believe, quite as worried as the West.

“THRUSH?” Solo said.

“I think we can safely detect their fine hand in this, Mr. Solo,” Waverly said. “Especially since they appear to be out to stop us before we start. A sign, I believe, of the high priority nature of whatever scheme they have.”

Waverly searched his tweed jacket for his tobacco pouch again.

“In addition, our Section-I representative for Africa, with whom I had the pleasure of speaking this morning, has some other indications. It appears that the man who will step into the dead president’s shoes out there may well be a THRUSH man. That would make the new country another THRUSH satrapy, I fear. In any event, each case would benefit THRUSH in its work enormously.”

There was a silence in the office. They were all thinking of the work of THRUSH. That supra-national organization, almost a nation of its own, had only one work—to dominate the world, to have the only power. To this end THRUSH had already invaded the body politic of the earth like some insidious virus. Everywhere on earth, high places and low, there were men who seemed to belong to various nations, but who, in fact belonged to only one nation—THRUSH

These men lived complete double lives, whether they were taxi-drivers of cabinet ministers. Their rank in the visible world did not necessarily coincide with their THRUSH ranking. A taxi-driver in New York could be a leader of THRUSH; a cabinet minister in Peru could be no more than a common soldier. At the head of THRUSH was the council—great men all, in both worlds: soldiers, industrialists, politicians, scientists.

Illya Kuryakin leaned forward across the circular table, his dark eyes fixed on Waverly. “I can understand the cases where THRUSH has something to gain. But what about the other incidents? Were they mistakes of THRUSH?”

“Possibly,” Waverly agreed.

“Or a cover,” Solo said. “Intended to hide the real incidents where they gained.

“Possibly,” Waverly agreed again. The older man sucked on his unlighted pipe. “I think, gentlemen, that we are dealing with both mistakes and a cover, but not in the usual sense. There is something here that does not meet the eye. Teenagers have been rioting, running wild at times, for many years. It is a part of our modern world, it seems. But now we have a difference. Now we have what appears to be true madness, insanity. Some

of it seems directed, some not. But in all cases, ultimate violence has ensued, and the young people, and others, have died—smiling! It is as if something had pushed the young people beyond the normal limits. We know they were not drugged in the normal sense, and despite much work we have discovered no agents provocateur. We are looking for something capable of turning great masses of young people into mindless monsters who kill, steal and perform planned atrocities apparently without direction! Something that works on great numbers, leaves no trace, and leads to single acts of definite method in some cases but not in all cases. That, gentlemen, is the key. Why does it work only in some cases? That is what we must know."

"Perhaps it is still experimental," Illya said. "That would explain why it doesn't work."

"That occurred to me," Waverly said. "And that is why we must move fast before it is perfected."

"How?" Solo said. "If there is no direction from outside, no agents, no visible contact with anyone, how can we trace it? You can't just go and question every member of a teenage mob!"

"Naturally not, Mr. Solo," Waverly said. "In any case that has been tried. The young people seem to know nothing, those who have survived. All they can tell us is that they suddenly felt the urge to be violent. In most cases, those who live have no true recollection of just how violent they have been."

"Like the alkaloid drugs," Illya said quickly. "Aware of what they are doing, but unaware of the speed, the degree."

"Exactly," Waverly said. "Over and over again authorities have reported that the teenagers appear to think they merely knocked down a person they have actually trampled to death."

"But they do know they have been violent?" Solo said.

"Yes, Mr. Solo. They know," Waverly said. The older man tapped his pipe on the circular table. "There is one more detail. Is is, I believe, vital. Over the past six months the cases have tended to be prolonged. That is, the

violence does not leave the young people as soon. Each time they appear to remain in their madness longer. We have no time to lose."

"But where do we start?" Solo demanded.

"In Kandaville, I think," Waverly said. "You see, we now have one clue, our only clue."

The older man turned back to the screen and pressed a button. Instantly the scene of the airfield at Kandaville appeared. It was the same as before. Bodies of dead teenagers, the battered and bloody police and troops, the wrecked aircraft, and the dead president on his face.

But, as Solo and Illya watched, the picture began to narrow its field, as though focusing on a single point.

"You will note the small group of police near the edge of the airfield," Mr. Waverly said.

The picture on the screen became a close-up of this group. Four policemen, bloody and holding their heads-and standing with them, helping one policeman, a single man wearing the uniform of a native soldier.

Solo and Illya stared hard at the hazy face in the blow-up. Waverly placed two prints of the blow-up on the circular table and revolved the top until the pictures were in front of the two agents.

"That face, gentlemen, belongs to Azid Ben Riilah, a Somali of Muslim parentage. He was born, supposedly, in Somaliland, but he has spent little time there. He appeared in Kenya during the Mau-Mau troubles. He was seen in both Stanleyville with the Gizenga rebels, and in Leopoldville with the other side in the Congo affair. He has been identified in Zulu peace parades in South Africa, also as a native informer for the Apartheid Government in the same country. In actuality he is an agent of THRUSH, uncovered only four months ago by Section-II men in Africa. There is absolutely no evidence of any action on his part that led to the mob that murdered the president down there. But he was there. You understand, gentlemen?"

"Is he still in Kandaville?" Solo said grimly.

“As far as Section-II there knows, he is,” Waverly said. The Leader of U.N.C.L.E. stood up in a gesture of dismissal. “He is your man. I assume you will think of just what to do with him?”

“Any suggestions, sir?” Solo asked. Waverly had returned to his desk. The older man seemed to have already forgotten the presence of his agents. The job he had just given Solo and Kuryakin was only one of many he had to consider each day. After a moment, Waverly appeared to hear and look up again.

“Eh? Oh, I’m sure you’ll think of something—uh—Solo.”

Illya was grinning like a cat as Solo turned away from Waverly. The two of them walked out through the door that silently opened and closed itself. They went to check on their transportation and on the Section-II agents in South Africa.

FIVE

Idlewild Airport, renamed John F. Kennedy International Airport, bustled with the night-departing passengers. Three giant jets were departing within the hour. Napoleon Solo, carrying a briefcase stepped to the loading desk to claim his seat on the London-bound B.O.A.C. jet.

Some buildings away, a small, bent old man with graying dark hair and a heavy beard shuffled up to the loading desk of the Air France flight non-stop to Paris. The uniformed loading clerk studied the old man closely but without giving himself away.

The old man muttered in French but with a heavy German accent. The loading clerk stamped his ticket, gave him his seating card, and turned his attention to the next person.

At the B.O.A.C. loading desk, the actions of a baggage handler were vastly different. Observing Napoleon Solo, the baggage handler suddenly bent over for a dropped suitcase.

At the loading desk, Solo was passed through and took his place on a seat to await the time to board. Idly, he noticed the baggage handler pushing his cart away down the long, bright corridor.

Solo became aware of the noise before he actually heard it. A rumbling like the sea, turning into a roar that came closer. Solo leaped up, walked quickly toward the fence that imprisoned him inside the loading area.

He was too late.

The first of a horde of teenagers appeared running at the far end of the wide and shining corridor. Behind the first few young boys and girls he saw a solid wall of howling teenagers coming toward the loading area. Solo whirled and sprinted for the door to the plane. It was locked.

Quickly he opened his briefcase and produced a small, circular object. He touched it to the electrically controlled door. He pressed a button. The door, activated by the special electronic circuit activator, sprung open. Solo

dashed through, just as the howling mob of teenagers reached the loading area and smashed down the fence.

In the loading ramp, a long tunnel with corrugated sides like some giant bellows, Solo ran toward the door into the jet. Already the howling teenagers were in the tunnel behind him.

Solo ran into the jet, past the protesting stewardess, and along the aisle toward the pilot's cabin. Behind him the teenagers knocked down the screaming stewardess.

Solo, inside the pilot's cabin, locked the door behind him. Again he opened his briefcase and produced a small pellet. Setting the pellet on the escape hatch, he pulled a tiny cord on the pellet and jumped back.

The door was bending, breaking under the pressure of the screaming mob behind him.

The pellet burst into white, flame-less heat, a heat that would melt any metal known. The escape hatch dropped open. Solo threw his briefcase out, lowered himself through the open hatch and let go.

He seemed to fall for minutes.

He hit hard on the concrete, rolled and came up on his feet. Above him the mob of teenagers had reached the hatch. One was already jumping through.

The first teenager jumped down, tilted in the air and landed on his side, screaming with the pain of a broken arm. Solo did not wait. Others were already jumping down. He picked up his briefcase and ran toward the distant corner of the loading building.

He reached the corner and turned it, the mob of teenagers strung out now behind him, some limping but still coming on. As he reached the next corner he stopped, skidded to a halt.

A second howling mob was coming at him from the other direction. He turned and ran out toward the great open area of the airfield, running with the speed that had made him a track star in his younger days.

As he ran into the dark night, he pulled the transmitter-receiver from his pocket. He raised the threadlike antennae.

“Sonny to Bubba. Sonny to Bubba. Condition Red, condition Red.” He pressed the receiving button.

“Bubba to Sonny. Instruct action. Am safely aboard.”

Solo pressed his sending button, trying to speak clearly as he ran on across the dark field.

“Proceed. They are after me. I’ll lead them off. Watch yourself.”

“Can I help? Repeat, can I help?” the distant voice of Illya said from the tiny receiver.

Solo stopped and looked around. He could hear the howling mob still behind him, coming closer. He pressed his send button.

“Proceed on mission. Good luck.”

Solo replaced the tiny set in his pocket. He listened. The mob seemed to be moving off, heading the wrong way. He smiled and began to trot, carrying his briefcase. He heard the sound of motors too late.

Glaring light pinned him in the night like a moth on a pin.

He dropped his briefcase and drew his U.N.C.L.E. Special. He aimed the Luger-like pistol at the lights. They were car headlights, one set on either side of him. He flicked the special button on his pistol to set it to fire bullets, not darts. He raised he pistol and aimed at the lights.

Something touched his neck. A faint, stinging prick.

He knew nothing more…

In his seat at the window of the Paris-bound jet, the old man with the beard muttered to himself. But it was neither French nor German he muttered. It was Russian—and his bright blue eyes were not old.

Illya replaced the tiny radio set in his pocket. He sat back in his seat. The disguise had worked for him. NO one had chased the old man who spoke such bad French. His head turned and he seemed to sleep facing the window of the jet.

But Illya was not asleep. His eyes peered out into the night. He saw the faint lights of headlights far off in the center of the

airfield. He had a sinking sensation as he looked at those strange lights and thought of Napoleon Solo. But there was work to do.

Soon, the jet took off. He had reported to headquarters the Condition Red call of Napoleon. There was nothing more he could do now, but get on with his task.

As the field passed below, all was dark.

ACT II: THRUSH and COUNTER-THRUSH

ONE

Napoleon Solo did not open his eyes. Awake, alert again, with no ill effects beyond a blinding headache and a pain in his neck where the dart had struck, he remained motionless. He was surprised to be still alive.

His hands, he knew, were bound behind him; his feet were encased in something soft yet strong. He probably did no have long to live, but the training of years never deserted him. He listened to the voices to remember them for future reference. Two men and a woman. He could not hear what they said, but he would never forget the timbre of their voices.

Cautiously, Solo opened his eyes. And saw nothing. He blinked, opened his eyes again—all was black, yet moving, fluttering with faint light.

As if his eyes were not open at all.

Yet he knew he was opening them; he knew the muscles were opening his eyes.

But his eyes were not open.

“Look, his eyes are moving,” the woman’s voice said. The voice of Maxine Trent.

“Fix the eyes,” a man’s deep voice said.

Something sprayed against his eyelids, a cool mist. He waited, blinked and his eyes came open.

“Hello, Napoleon,” Maxine said.

She stood before him, changed now. The soft female face was longer, harder. Her languid clothes of the afternoon had been changed for a severe black suit, a wide-brimmed hat pulled low. But she was smiling the same smile. She was still almost six feet tall, yet not too tall. Solo sighed. Even here and now she was a beautiful woman.

“Hello, Maxine,” Solo said, mustering up a smile.

Behind Maxine all was black. He could not make out any shape to the room. There was a bright light on a fine inlaid table, but the light did not seem to reach any corners anywhere.

Solo could just make out the shapes of two men behind Maxine. He could not see them. While he was pretending to stare hard to make them out, he tested his bonds. The rope around his wrists behind the chair he was sitting in seemed secure. The soft material encasing his feet would not budge.

He glanced down to be sure of what he was up against, and he stared. Maxine Trent laughed mockingly. Solo stared at his feet. There was nothing holding them—nothing at all. They were encased in nothing, yet he felt some soft but strong material holding his feet.

There was nothing holding his feet, yet he could not move them. When he tried to move them the unseen material clung and cut into his legs. Maxine laughed again.

“If you could turn around, Napoleon, you would see that there is nothing holding your hands, either. No rope at all. See?”

Maxine held two mirrors in such a way that he could see his bound hands behind the chair. There was no rope. There was nothing holding his hands, yet they were bound tight.

“A toy, Mr. Solo,” the deep male voice said from the darkness.

“A simple hypnotic drug that paralyzes the muscles and induces the brain to ascribe some physical cause, such as ropes or a cement block on the feet. It is both effective as a restraining device, as a demonstration of our limitless sources of power.”

There was a sudden hiss from the dark, an eerie sound like wind whistling through a thin reed. Reedy, hissing and yet it was a voice. It was the weird, toneless voice of the other man hidden in the dark.

“We waste time. He will tell us,” the hissing voice said.

Maxine Trent seemed to stiffen like a dog whose master has whistled. Her beautiful face changed, became a mask. A tremor very like fear seemed to shudder through her.

Solo stared toward the point in the dark where the reedy voice had hissed. It was a voice that was inhuman, made not of flesh and bone but of metal and plastic, yet Solo knew now that this was the voice of a leader of THRUSH—a council member. It had to be, to make Maxine jump like a dog in obedience and terror.

“Tell us what Waverly told you, Napoleon,” Maxine Trent said. “It will save time.”

“I like to see THRUSH work,” Solo said calmly. “Sometimes I even learn something.”

The deep male voice snapped in the dark. “The needle.”

Solo laughed. “Pentathol? How unimaginative. I really expected better, especially with a council member present.”

The reedy hiss of the hidden voice neither laughed nor threatened. “Council Member N if that will help, Mr. Solo. And the needle does not contain pentathol. That would be far too slow and unreliable. NO, I have developed something much better. Its effect is similar, but it acts instantly; no one can withstand it.”

“Proceed, Agent Trent,” the deep male voice ordered.

Maxine approached with the needle. Solo thought about the deep voice. This had to belong to a chief agent, above Maxine Trent, but below the horrible hissing voice. Somehow he had to see them.

“Try to relax, Napoleon,” Maxine Trent said. “You will anyway. In five seconds you will tell us all you know.”

The beautiful woman raised the needle, found a vein in his paralyzed arm, and plunged the point into his flesh.

TWO

Illya Kuryakin leaned to look out the window of the small jet as it circled the city below. A white city, dazzling in the African sun, the great river curving like a snake around the buildings. Even from the sky, Illya could see the great white government buildings in the center, and the grey-brown shacks surrounding them where the people still lived.

Illya stared down. It was for this that he had left the service of his own country—to bridge that terrible gap between the great white buildings and the miserable shacks of the people. To free the great river that wound below to serve the people, all the people.

He had seen the failure of a dream in his own country, the failure of many dreams in many places, and other places where there had not yet even been time to dream amid the misery.

And, somewhere sown there was a man, Azid Ben Rillah, who served a "nation" that wanted to destroy all dreams—all dreams but the dream of keeping every misery as it was. Down there, somewhere, THRUSH was at work to keep the hovels dirty, to forever separate the power from the people.

It was a "nation" Illya would destroy, and all like it. Then, perhaps, he could listen to his jazz records, read his books, travel as he had always wanted to, alone and afraid of no on and nothing, with no one afraid of him.

"Fasten your seatbelts please."

The voice of the stewardess pulled Illya from his reverie. He fastened his seatbelt and waited. He had abandoned his disguise in Paris—even Napoleon might be made to talk—and now sat in the small jet a Specialist Tworkov of the Soviet trade mission to the new country. A drooping blond mustache hid his young face. He had acquired a creditable limp. Thick glasses hid his dark eyes. All his weapons were checked and in place.

Illya left the jet fourth in line. Behind the thick glasses his eyes watched. The field was clear. A fawning native porter ran up to clutch his

suitcase. Illya casually fingered the deadly, needle-like knife in his side pocket. The native porter grinned up.

“Bwana have three more suitcase?”

“Can you carry three or six?” Illya said.

“Uphill three, downhill six,” the native said.

“I have only one.” Illya said.

“One is very good. I am twelve,” the native said.

“I am nine,” Illya said.

“So?” the native said. “Welcome to Africa, Mr. Kuryakin. Follow me closely.”

Illya followed the porter across the field, his eyes, behind the thick lenses, scrutinizing everyone who neared them. The porter moved fast, did not pause on his way into the single main building of the airport. Once inside the building the porter led Illya to customs, and through customs under the regular procedure.

Illya continued to follow the porter out to a taxi. Once inside the taxi, Illya watched the porter vanish. The taxi driver waited for Illya’s instruction.

“Imperial Hotel,” Illya said.

The driver nodded and drove off. Once out of the area of the airport, with no cars in sight on the sunny morning, the driver reached into his pocket and brought out an innocent card. It was plastic.

Illya opened a small bottle of fluid and placed a drop on the plastic. A faint purple spot appeared. It had identified the driver as Joseph Ngara.

“You were supposed to have another man with you,” Joseph Ngara said.

“We ran into trouble in New York.”

“I’m sorry. Who was it?”

“Napoleon Solo,” Illya said. The taxi swerved a hair. “Napoleon? I’ve worked with him. Damn, Kuryakin, we can’t afford to lose chief enforcement agents like him.”

“We haven’t lost him yet,” Illya said. “You’re Section-II out here?”

“Chief enforcement agent for Section-II, Africa. Our Section-I man briefed me,” Joseph Ngara said. “We had our eye on Rillah for some time, but we only got proof he was THRUSH a few months ago.”

“Have you found what he is doing here?”

“Not precisely,” Ngara said, “but he arrived less than a week before the riot that killed the president. We picked up one clue, a word: PowerTen. Two words, really, but our, ah, source says he heard it as one word: PowerTen.”

“Your source is reliable?’ Illya asked.

“Reliable but low-placed. He heard Rillah use the word twice when talking otherwise in code on the telephone. The word seemed to impress Rillah.”

“Anything else? Any weaknesses we can use to make him talk?” Illya asked.

“You know better, Illya,” Ngara said. “THRUSH agents don’t have weaknesses.”

“Everyone has a weakness somewhere, Ngara,” Illya said. “Only THRUSH knows how to neutralize the weaknesses of their agents. Is there anything unusual about Rillah?”

“Yes, he likes modern jazz music. He frequents a place called The Yellow Zebra. Almost every night he’s there.”

“Jazz?” Illya said.

“It’s more this rock and roll, the long-haired kids with guitars,” Ngara said.

Teenage music! Illya’s dark eyes narrowed. He sat back in the taxi.

“I think we had better visit The Yellow Zebra tonight,” Illya said. Ngara nodded. By this time they had reached the Imperial Hotel. Illya paid Ngara as he would any driver, and went in to claim the room reserved for Comrade Tworkov. All was in order: the Russian trade mission was, conveniently, out of the city at this time. Section-V did not make mistakes when they arranged a cover. Illya examined the room, secured it against surprise attack, and slept soundly until time to go that night.

* * *

The Yellow Zebra was a loud neon glare in the night of Kandaville. It was a small club, down a flight of stairs from the street. A quartet of young men played and sang in strong rhythm on the bandstand. They played well, and Illya nodded his appreciation as he entered with Ngara. The young girls of the city whirled across the dance floor, their young bodies quick and alive.

“There,” Ngara said.

Illya looked. Azid Ben Rillah sat alone at a table near the bandstand. The Somali lounged indolently, a long, Russian-made cigarette dangling slack from his full lips, a glass of some colorless liquid in front of him. His strong, dark hands fondled the glass like a lover, raised it to his lips from time to time.

Illya slipped into a seat at a table behind Rillah. Joseph Ngara sat with him. Illya had removed his disguise now. The Russian Tworkov was supposedly asleep in the Imperial Hotel.

The blond U.N.C.L.E. agent looked nothing more than a young music lover on the town, but his sharp eyes missed nothing. He noted the faint sign given by Ngara to a young waiter and to a lithe girl singer who came out now on the bandstand and smiled softly at Azid Ben Rillah.

“Rillah seems a little interested,” Ngara said without looking at Illya. “But I’m worried. He’s smart, and Mahyana is one of our newest agents. I’m afraid she’ll overplay it. But someone has to get close to him.”

“There may not be time,” Illya said. “Whatever they have, it seems to be advanced rapidly. Perhaps a day, two days, but then we’ll have to force his hand. We.”

Azid Ben Rillah suddenly turned around in his seat and his deep-set brown eyes passed across Illya’s face. To anyone but an agent as sharply trained as Kuryakin it would have appeared that Rillah barely noticed him, for the brown eyes immediately shifted away to look at another part of the room.

But Illya Kuryakin knew better. Azid Ben Rillah had been shocked within a hair of his life when he had seen Illya. There had been no more than a flicker in the brown eyes of the Somali, a faint stiffening of Rillah's body, a minute knotting of the corded muscles of the THRUSH agent's neck. But it had been enough to betray him.

Azid Ben Rillah had recognized Illya—and had been startled.

Which meant, at least, that Napoleon Solo had not talked yet. A man who had known Illya was coming would not have been shocked at the sight of him.

Illya felt a sudden coldness in his stomach.

What was it?

Something he, Illya, saw in the dark face of Azid Ben Rillah. What? Damn it, Kuryakin, he told himself silently, what was it?

He stared at the dark face of the Somali. Rillah, recovering instantly as befitted a trained agent of THRUSH, was casually continuing his contemplation of the lithe and soft young dancers. Illya abandoned all attempts at concealment. He stared at the dark indolent face.

Yes! It was the face. Something—something he had not seen in the fuzzy blowup in New York. A picture can only tell so much, and the picture in New York had not been a good one. Now, with the live face before is staring eyes, Illya saw something different, something—familiar!

Yes, familiar! He knew that face. Not as it was, not dark like this, and the eyes—Illya stared, forced his mind back and back. How far? How far back was it?

Rillah, he knew, had had a similar feeling; the Somali knew Illya from somewhere. But where, when? The eyes—blue! But no Somali had blue eyes. The face floating somewhere in the dim past of Illya's mind had blue eyes and a fair skin, not a Somali at all.

It was something no picture could show, but the aspect of that face, the real live face, was know to Illya. Far back. Before U.N.C.L.E. Yes, long before U.N.C.L.E. when he had served in the Soviet—

And he had it!

He knew who Azid Ben Rillah really was.

In that instant the Somali who was not a Somali suddenly stood and walked quickly for a curtained doorway at the side of the room.

Illya leaped in pursuit.

Joseph Ngara was right behind him. Ngara nodded sharply to the waiter, who was one of his men, and to the girl singer. The waiter dropped his tray and clawed under his coat.

The girl singer lifted her skirt showing long, beautiful legs like smooth brown marble—and showing a tiny holster from which she drew her small pistol.

The three African Section-II members converged on the curtained doorway. Illya had been quick but Azid Ben Rillah had been even quicker. The fake Somali vanished through the doorway.

Illya followed, through a passageway and out, suddenly, into the dark African night of an alley that stank of garbage.

Rillah was waiting.

The fusillade of shots from the semi-automatic pistol hammered the night, striking chips from the stone wall, bare inches from Illya's head.

Illya went down, his U.N.C.L.E. Special out. He clicked the control to the paralyzing-dart magazine. He needed Rillah alive—false brown colored contact lenses and all.

Rillah stepped out, firing madly.

Illya raised his pistol from where he lay and fired once, twice. The sharp spit of the pistol firing darts was barely heard in the night.

Azid Ben Rillah clawed at his neck and went down, rigid on the filthy stones of the alley.

Illya started to rise.

They came from both sides at once.

Joseph Ngara and his two agents came out the door, guns ready.

The six strangers came from the open end of the alley. Their guns were held out in front of them. They stood crouched, legs straddled wide, firing

as they came.

Joseph Ngara went down, riddled and dead.

The waiter choked on his own blood in his torn throat.

The girl singer sprawled in the shelter of two heavy garbage cans. She crouched, her dress torn open, legs and breast brown in the dim light—and she never stopped firing.

Her small pistol empty, she grabbed and reached Ngara's U.N.C.L.E. Special, set it on automatic, fired a withering fire toward the killers coming fast down the alley.

Illya clicked his Special to bullets and poured fire into the six strangers.

Six who were only three now, the others dead or dying.

No one had spoken a word. They were all trained, and words did not help. Cries of pain or anger only wasted time, spoiled the deadly aim.

Illya smiled like a wolf in battle. Three to two, but he and the girl had cover; the three THRUSH men did not.

Azid Ben Rillah lay silent between the two battling sides.

Illya aimed carefully this time. It would soon be over.

And the three remaining THRUSH agents suddenly vanished in great sheets of flame. Flame licked high in the alley. Flame that rushed across the ground toward the girl and Illya as if pushed on a strong wind. But there was no wind.

Illya felt cold.

They had thrown flame bombs, deadly flames that fed on their own creeping fuel and moved toward Illya to consume him.

THREE

Napoleon Solo talked, his voice filling the dark, cornerless room where Maxine Trent stood above him and the two hidden men stood behind in the shadows. Maxine still held the needle. An instant in his arm and Solo began to talk at once.

“Mary had a little lamb. Its fleece was white as snow. And everwhere that Mary went. The lamb was sure to go.”

“Tell us!” Maxine Trent cried. “What did Waverly tell you?”

“Baa baa Black sheep, have you any wool?” Solo said, his voice crisp and precise. “Yes sir, yes sir, three bags full!”

The reedy, inhuman voice hissed from the dark. “Slap him, you fool! He has to tell us. The serum cannot be evaded. He has to tell us what he knows!”

Maxine Trent slapped Solo hard. Blood trickled lightly from the corner of his mouth.

“The nineteen forty-two St. Louis Cardinals were one of the great teams of all time. Ray Sanders played first base, Marty Marion was at shortstop, Stan Musical was in right field, Enos Slaughter.”

Now the deep voice cursed from the dark room. Maxine Trent stared at Solo, turned to look helplessly, with fear in her eyes toward the hidden men. The deep-voiced man spoke.

“It is no use; he has been conditioned. He can tell us nothing this way.”

“Conditioned?” the thin, hissing voice said.

“U.N.C.L.E. has its methods, too,” the deep-voiced man said.

“Conditioning so that under any form of truth serum a man will only tell what he has been conditioned to tell. It is a long process, much too long for general use. I know they had conditioned the five Section-I members to give us false data; we had Waverly once, and everything he told us was

false. But I did not know they had extended it down to Section-II. You will get nothing but nonsense from Solo this way."

There was silence. Maxine Trent stared down at the babbling Solo as he reeled off the personnel and exploits of the 1942 St. Louis Cardinals baseball team. The needle in her hand seemed ludicrous now. She wanted to stop Solo, shut him up, turn off the endless stream of ridiculous information.

She slapped him, but he neither blinked nor stopped, rendered helpless by the truth drug.

"Stop him," the reedy voice hissed.

A hand holding another needle appeared from the dark. Maxine Trent took it again plunged it into Solo's arm. Solo stopped babbling at once. His eyes came unglazed. He blinked, grinned up at Maxine Trent.

"I trust you enjoyed all my information, Maxine," Solo said.

The deep voice cursed again in the dark behind Maxine Trent.

"Prepare him. We will have to use older methods," the deep voice said.

"Anything," the hissing voice cried from the dark. "I must know what Waverly knows! The smallest error must be corrected! You understand?"

"Yes," Maxine Trent said. She looked down at Solo. "I'm sorry, Napoleon, but you won't cooperate. You can't be conditioned against simple torture."

"Try me," Solo said.

The deep voice whispered somewhere off in the darkness. Then a hand appeared again from the dark. It held another hypodermic needle.

"Release him from the hypnotic drug, make him comfortable," the deep voice said.

Maxine did as she was instructed. Almost at once Solo felt as if the ropes were gone, the soft material holding his feet was taken away. He moved, stretching the cramps from his muscles. A hand came out of the dark, holding a glass with amber fluid in it.

“Give him a drink,” the deep voice said. “The best Scotch whiskey, Mr. Solo.”

Solo drank and the warmth coursed through his body.

“Perhaps a sandwich, some hot coffee?” the deep voice said.

Solo nodded and his mind came alive. Inside, there was sudden flicker, a plan. He was aware of what the deep-voiced chief agent of THRUSH was doing—the hot and cold treatment. A variant. In torture it is the sudden changes that break a man. The coming and going and coming again of pain.

They were awakening his nerves, his responses. Almost any man can face danger once; it is the second time, the third time that are hard. Likewise in torture. Once the pain began a man could slowly learn to stand it, to self-condition his body to take the increasing degrees of pain.

It was the swing from pain to peace, to pain again that was hard. First agony, then relief, then agony, and again relief, until what finally broke a man was fear of the next agony.

They knew this, and they were relaxing his defenses. How far would they go? A faint hope flickered. A double hope, and a plan. He had his cigarette lighter camera in his pocket. He could feel it. An he still had the small but powerful gas bomb that was his innocent-seeming pearl stickpin. He did not think that the deep-voiced man or the hissing-voiced Council Member N would apply the torture.

Another aspect of good torture was to leave the victim alone with some mindless torturer, someone who could not be talked to. The true interrogator went away, and the victim in his agony almost prayed for the return of one who would listen. It was a chance. Solo nodded, breathed.

“First, if I could, a cigarette?” Solo said quietly.

“Of course,” the deep-voiced man said from the dark. “Maxine, give him a cigarette.”

Maxine handed Solo a cigarette. He reached quickly into his pocket for his lighter. He flicked it once, twice, three times before the flame burst out and he lighted his cigarette. The reedy voice hissed.

“The lighter, you fools! It is a camera!”

Maxine grabbed at the lighter. But Solo had anticipated her. The instant he had taken his three pictures of the dark ahead of him through the infra-red lens, he had pressed the tiny button that dropped the miniature film cartridge into his hand.

As Maxine grabbed the camera, he palmed the tiny cartridge and let it vanish up his sleeve.

“Open it!” the reedy voice hissed.

Maxine opened it and removed the film cartridge she found there. Solo tried to look beaten. They did not know that the camera had a special optical arrangement that took pictures on both cartridges through a single lens. The camera was made for just such an eventuality. There would be a cartridge in the camera—and it would be exposed in case they checked to be sure.

The deep-voiced man checked.

“Not bad shots, Mr. Solo. I admire you. Infra-red. I never underestimate U.N.C.L.E. Too bad you underestimate me.”

“Why bother?” Maxine Trent said. “He won’t leave here alive.”

The hiss of the inhuman voice was almost like a laugh this time as it burst low and horrible from the darkness.

“You see too many spy movies, Agent Trent. No, we will not tell him what he wants to know because he will die. This is not a movie. Prepare him now; we can waste no more time. We will send in Gotz.”

The deep-voiced man laughed. “We will leave you now, Mr. Solo. Miss Trent and Gotz will take good care of you. If you find you would like to talk, just send for us. We will not be far.”

Suppressing the smile he felt at their predictable actions, Solo flexed his arms as if preparing his body to resist the tortures of the unknown Gotz. One of the weaknesses of power was the tendency to always use the same methods to enforce its strength.

Solo had often seen this peculiarity of power-mad nations. It had been one of the weaknesses of Hitler’s Germany, and it was a common, fundamental weakness of THRUSH.

But it was the time to act. Solo did not know how many men would be with the unknown Gotz.

Maxine stood watching him, her pistol in her hand, now that he was free. She was the proper distance away, and the rest of the room was still lost in darkness. Solo would need time to find a door, and exit. He stretched.

“Careful, Napoleon,” Maxine said. “I would hate to shoot you now. Too bad you have to be U.N.C.L.E. They’ll never let me keep you now.”

“I’m sorry, really, Maxine,” Solo said, continuing to flex his arms and legs, but carefully.

“You’d make a lovely pet. I could tranquilize you every day,” the tall beautiful agent purred. “My little kitten. But you have to be U.N.C.L.E. Why couldn’t you have been just C.I.A., or British MI-five? They’d have let me play with you then.”

“I’ll try to do better next time,” Solo said.

“Poor Napoleon. Always trying,” Maxine said. “It wasn’t nice of you to trap me earlier, was it? How did you guess? The record player I imagine. I told `N’ that you would guess when it shut off and the tape recorder came on.”

“It was a trifle too convenient, Maxine,” Solo said. And he distracted her for an instant. “So `N’ isn’t that smart?”

“Not as smart as he thinks,” Maxine said smugly, her guard down the fraction of a second as a result of her anger at her leader. “They think they can’t make errors on the Council. They.”

Solo moved. His hand flicked up and across his tie, tore the pearl stickpin out and hurled it at Maxine’s feet, all in a single motion.

The force of pulling it out set off the fuse. A cloud of gas exploded and engulfed Maxine Trent. Still the beautiful agent managed to fire a single shot. The bullet tore a furrow, skin deep in the side of Napoleon Solo’s head. He went down, but came back up almost at once. His head ached, but there was not much time, not after the shot.

Maxine Trent lay crumpled on the floor of the room. She would be unconscious for hours. Solo stepped quickly through the light into the dark corners. He found, once his eyes were accustomed to the dark, that the room was large and empty. Only the inlaid table and the lamp were in the completely silent room.

And there were no doors.

Solo blinked, looked.

There was nothing but smooth walls without doors or windows. He walked quickly around the entire perimeter of the room. There was no way out. And then he saw that the room was soundproof. This, at least, gave him a little time to locate some exit. There had to be a way. But he could not find it. Nothing but bare smooth walls.

Routine—and a little luck—came to his aid. Solo had been an agent for a long time, he knew no one survived long without a little luck, accident or pure chance, all helped by the mistakes of the enemy. THRUSH had a prescribed routine of operation, and it helped Solo now.

A tiny red light winked on, winked three times, and stopped. But it was enough. It had to be a signal that someone was about to enter the room. A precaution, of course, since all agents who used this room undoubtedly had standing orders to shoot anyone who entered without the signal. A precaution that would save him.

Solo waited.

The wall opened silently, without even a hiss, directly beneath the winking red light. A man stepped through. Two men.

The second man was a tall, slender Chinese carrying a machine pistol. Solo chopped him down with a single blow to the neck under the ear.

The first man turned slowly.

He was the biggest man Solo had ever seen. A giant well over seven feet tall, weighing over three hundred fifty pounds without an ounce of fat anywhere. There was no doubt that this was Gotz, the torturer.

Gotz turned ponderously, his tiny pig eyes seeing the Chinese lying on the ground, Maxine lying unconscious. He moved toward Solo.

There was not an instant to wait. Once in those giant hands Solo would have no hope. The giant could not be fought. One chance was all Solo would have, and he took it.

His feet braced against the wall, Solo pushed off as hard as he could and hurled himself toward the giant. His open hand thrust straight up and forward. The heel of his hand caught the giant flush on the point of the chin, snapping the giant's neck back with enough force to break a roof beam.

Surprised, ponderous, the giant could not evade the single blow. His head snapped back on his bull neck. He staggered, grunted once with pain and collapsed in a quivering mass of bone and muscle. It was a blow that would have instantly killed almost any man on earth, but Solo did not think the giant was dead.

He turned and dashed through the opening without waiting a second. He ran down a narrow steel corridor. At the far end there was a door. At the door Solo stopped, took off his shoe, removed the heel and took out the thin strip of thermite foil. He stuck the foil to the lock area, pulled the magnesium fuse and jumped back.

A large hole melted in the door. Solo pushed and the door opened. Alarms went off, loud, clanging. But he was in a bright hallway. There was light. He reached a window. Outside he saw the city and below him the river. He was still in New York, in some riverfront warehouse building.

The alarm clanged on; feet pounded.

The river was three stories below. The window was locked and could not be opened. Solo backed up, wrapped his suit coat around his head and dived through the glass. He fell, jack-knifed in the air, and hit the water in a clean dive.

Under water he let his coat go and swam for the dark shadow. He came up underneath the building. The film cartridge was still safe inside his shirt. A tug passed close on the river. He swam for it.

FOUR

In the Kandaville alley, Illya Kuryakin watched the flames flow toward him. The girl singer was still firing.

“Back!” Illya shouted. “Get Rillah!”

The flames that roared around them, slowly engulfing the alley had one advantage. They hid them from the THRUSH agents. Crouched low, Illya and the girl, Mahyana, dragged the paralyzed Rillah back away from the flames.

The flames blocked them from the door of The Yellow Zebra. The other wall had no openings of any kind. The wall of the club had a window, but it was high up, too high. Illya and the girl looked around. There was no way out. The flames flowed inexorably closer. Illya looked at the pretty, dark girl.

“There is only one way,” he said. “We will have to go out through the fire.”

“They’re waiting,” Mahyana said.

“There is no other way,” Illya cried, raising his voice now as the flames licked at the buildings, crackling in the night.

“All right,” Mahyana said. “I’m ready. But we will have to leave Rillah. We.”

The sound came from above. Illya whirled; his Special aimed, ready. But he did not fire. Above them the window had opened high up. A face leaned out. A face with a black beard.

“Here, Dad—grab on!”

It was the bearded man calling down from the window. A rope came out, dropped. Illya looked at the flames. He pushed Mahyana and she climbed up the dangling rope like a panther up a tree. Bending, Illya quickly tied the rope beneath the inert arms of Azid Ben Rillah. Then he swarmed up the rope himself.

Inside the window he hauled the unconscious Rillah up and into the room, where they all stood. Flames licked at the walls of the room. Fire engine sirens were wailing closer.

“You could of got singed, man,” the bearded man said.

“Yes, we could have been burned a little,” Illya said.

The bearded man looked out the window once more.

“Say, that’s some fire. I mean, how come it burns so good on stone like that, Dad?”

“It would take too long to explain,” Illya said, “but we thank you. Now I suggest we leave. The fire seems to be burning the building.

“I hear you, Dad. We abandon the scene,” the bearded man said.

Illya and the bearded man carried the inert form of Rillah out and down a flight of dark back stairs. Mahyana led the way, the U.N.C.L.E. Special she had taken from the dead Ngara ready in her hand.

“A cool chick, man,” the bearded man said.

Illya studied his new helper. A boy, really, not a man. But a boy who had had the right strength at the right time.

The bearded kid saw Illya watching him.

“I play banjo, man,” the bearded boy said. “Joe Hooker.”

“Fighting Joe?” Illya said.

“You beat me, man? Just Joe Hooker from Hoboken. I play banjo with The Beavers, take a chorus sometimes. We come out here for the loot. Out here it’s still beards. The long hair ain’t made it yet.”

“Well, Mr. Joe Hooker, I thank you.”

“Say no more, man,” the bearded boy said.

They carried Rillah to the cellar of the club and out a side entrance Mahyana knew.

The dark girl surveyed the street carefully.

“Come,” she waved with her pistol.

They carried Rillah to her waiting car. Joe Hooker went back to his banjo. Illya drove fast away from The Yellow Zebra toward a safe room where Mahyana directed him.

* * *

Napoleon Solo, a bandage on his head, and wearing a fresh suit, watched Alexander Waverly study the photographs he had taken in the THRUSH room.

“They will have abandoned that place by now, of course,” Waverly remarked. “You say the voice sounded mechanical?’

“Like wind through metal and plastic,” Solo said.

“Yes,” Waverly said as if thinking about it. “You have given our chemical people all you can about the drugs they used on you? Well, what do you make of the pictures?”

Solo looked at his copies of the blowups. “The one you can see I recognize. He was the baggage handler at Idlewild. Hardly a council member.”

“No, I think not. A chief agent, though, and we know him. Good work, that,” Waverly said. “Which voice do you think he was?”

“The deep voice. He had to be, sir.”

Waverly nodded, looked for his pipe. “Unfortunate that the other is turned away. We can hardly see his face at all in any picture. Still, we know he is small, rather thin, and has an odd voice. From what you say, he may also be a chemist himself. Council members are often scientists in their own right, you know.”

Solo studied the pictures. “Research says that from the cut and the cloth of his suit he could be British, or from any of the Commonwealth nations.”

Waverly found his pipe. “A rather large Commonwealth, I should say.”

“What puzzles me, ” Solo said, “is that voice. I’m sure it was his real voice, and how could he hide it? Why don’t we have anything in our files? It stands to reason he’s an important man—all THRUSH Council members are. We should have the voice on file.”

Waverly searched for his tobacco. “They ran it through. The result was negative. Possibly the man never speaks in public. Have you seen my tobacco?”

“It’s in the second drawer. You put it there,” Solo said. Waverly opened the second drawer. “Ah, yes, thank you. I suggest we wait for a report from Mr.—ah—Kuryakin. It seems he has good prospect in Kandaville.”

* * *

Azid Ben Rillah came awake in the hidden room of U.N.C.L.E.‘s Section-II in Kandaville.

Illya sat in a straight-backed chair, the chair turned so that he could rest his chin on the back, and watched the Somali come awake. The room was as secure as human brains could make it. It was high, with a wide view of the great river that skirted the city.

Azid Ben Rillah touched is face and looked at Illya. The small, blond U.N.C.L.E. agent smiled.

“It won’t come off, the skin coloring,” Illya said. “But I removed the contact lenses. Your eyes are blue again.”

Rillah nodded. “I thought you spotted me.” The fake Somali lapsed into his native language—Russian. “How have you been, Illya?”

“Quite well, thank you, Alexy. Interesting that you kept the initials,” Illya said, also in his native tongue. “Alexy Borayavitch Razov and Azid Ben Rillah. You were reported dead.”

“Our homeland dislikes defectors,” Alexy Razov said. “I felt safer to vanish after I turned my coat, shall we say. And you? Since you were looking for me, I gather you still work for our friends the secret police? Am I to expect a quick and secret trip home? After ten years it will be strange. All that snow. Hard on a poor Somali.”

“No, Alexy, home is not where you are going. Exactly where you go will be up to you.”

Razov sat up on the bed. He looked down at the chains on his hands and feet. Then the dark-skinned man with the strange blue eyes looked at Illya.

“How is it up to me?”

“If you like, you can be safely in New York tomorrow. In London. Anywhere you choose. And with a new face, a new identity.”

“New face? You can do that?”

The turncoat Russian was studying Illya very carefully. Razov seemed to be suddenly afraid, very afraid.

“You could protect me? Hide me?” Razov said.

“Yes,” Illya said. The ex-Soviet agent was trembling. “In exchange for what?”

“For the meaning of PowerTen. For where it is being made, and for what exactly it does.”

Razov seemed to collapse on the bed. The dark-skinned, blue-eyed turncoat lay on the bed shivering, his lips trembling. Razov’s whole body shook as if in the grip of some terrible fever. His Russian was broken, shaking.

“You know! You know what I am. Then.” Razov turned his face to stare at Illya, “then—you must be with—U.N.C.L.E.! Yes I see it now, U.N.C.L.E.! I wondered about that girl, the singer. Damn you to hell, you’re with U.N.C.L.E. and I’m done, finished.”

“We can hide you from THRUSH,” Illya said.

“Oh, damn you! Why? Why?” Razov cried. “We were friends!”

“It seems that we took different paths, Alexy,” Illya said.

“Very different paths.”

Razov sat up, his fear gone for a moment. “U.N.C.L.E.! A pack of milk-sops, do-gooders, bleeding hearts! What counts in this world but power, money, victory? THRUSH will be everything soon! Everything!”

“No, ” Illya said. “THRUSH will be nothing. They are nothing now and they will always be nothing but an evil force doomed to failure.”

Razov turned white under his dark tint. “Failure! You know who I am. I’m dead. I’m through. They will kill me now.”

“We can protect you, Alexy!” Illya said. Alexy laughed. A hollow, hopeless laugh. A laugh of the dead and the damned.

“No one can protect me, Illya,” the turncoat Russian said. “I can’t even make a deal. They will kill me now.”

“Don’t be an utter fool! They can’t reach you here,” Illya said testily. Razov began to laugh.

“They can’t get to you. They can’t even know what room you’re in!” Illya cried. Razov laughed harder, a wild, hysterical laugh made up partly of fear, partly of sardonic amusement.

“They don’t have to reach me, you fool. They don’t have to know what room you have me in. They only have to know what building it is and they know that. Look!” The former Russian agent pointed a long finger toward the window of the room. Illya whirled. At first he saw nothing. Only a window nine stories above the street. The he saw it.

Outside the window, over a hundred yards away, he saw a kite flying. A large, flying toy. But it was no toy. Illya took his binoculars and went to the window. The kite was not a kite. It was a type of balloon; it had a small motor that could maneuver it. And its long, stiff string that was not string but thin cable went down to where two men stood on the roof of a building. The men were wearing earphones.

“That microphone can pick up within six hundred feet,” Razov said. “They hear all I say.”

“But they still can’t reach you, and we’ll soon stop their eavedropping,” Illya said calmly.

He took out his U.N.C.L.E. Special, fitted the tubular metal stock, the telescopic sight,a nd placed the weapon against his shoulder. He fired twice. One shot cut the thin cable. The second shot punctured the balloon device and the kite fell. On the roof below, the two men vanished.

“Now that they can’t hear you or get to you,” Illya said. “Now you can tell me what PowerTen is.”

“You fool,” Razov said.

And laughed.

It was the last sound Alexy Borayavitch Razov, alias Azid Ben Rillah, ever made.

There was a small explosion, a puff of white smoke from Razov's cnest, and the laugh died in a strangled scream. Razov fell over backwards and lay with his dead eyes staring up at nothing.

Later, in New York, Waverly and Napoleon Solo listened to the report of Illya Kuryakin by overseas relay on the miniature radio set.

"It was sewn under his skin. It must have been there for years. A very powerful explosive pellet, too thin to be seen. There was only the smallest scar, and no metal to be detected."

Illya's voice, from distant Kandaville, continued. "I would imagine all THRUSH agents must have such a device inserted in their bodies. When they are caught, it is detonated remotely to silence them—in most cases probably at once. This time they tried their listening device first. They know we are on to PowerTen."

Waverly was solemn. "Very well, Mr. Kuryakin. It can't be helped. Did you find any leads at all?"

"One," the far-off voice of the small Russian said. "It was in his shoe, under the inner sole. A ticket, I think, admitting two to a performance of The Bedlam Trio in a Sydney night club."

Solo leaned across the table in the New York office. "Sydney? Our unknown council member "N" could have come from Australia, sir."

"So I recall," Waverly said dryly. "Yes, I think Australia would be likely place to look next. Do you hear me, Mr. Kuryakin?"

There was a chuckle from distant Africa.

"Then I will meet Napoleon in Bedlam."

Waverly winced noticeably. "Please keep your humor in some kind of check, Mr. Kuryakin. But, yes, by all means, join Mr. Solo in Bedlam at once. Before Illya had apologized for his bad joke, Napoleon Solo was on his way out the door to pick up his tickets for Sydney, Australia.

ACT III: TRIO OF BEDLAM

ONE

The harbor of Sydney is spanned by a giant semi-circular arched bridge that towers above the water. It is the first thing you see as you fly in. Then came Customs. The third would be, for more weary travelers, one of the Australian city's modern hotels, or perhaps the great beaches later for a swim.

For Napoleon Solo and Illya Kuryakin, after Customs there was only a clandestine meeting, a joining of forces.

After that came the howling teenagers.

Four hundred howling, screaming young people, dancing a frenzy to the music of five quartets of long-haired, bearded young men under high hanging cages, where slim-legged and full-breasted young girls danced behind the hanging bars.

The Bedlam.

The muscular man on the door, far beyond his teens, checked their ticket.

"Sorry mate, tickets only. That it? Right, go on in."

The big man beamed at them and turned his attention to the next group trying to enter the madhouse of music and stamping young feet. For his sortie into Bedlam, Solo had changed his usually impeccable clothes for a shoddy sweater and tight jeans.

Illya did not have to change; his tight black trousers and usual black shirt, coupled with his blond haystack hair, made him seem part of it all.

Behind them, with a carefully procured ticket, was the dark, slim Mahyana.

Illya had brought the African Section-II agent with him—what better agent for The Bedlam than a girl singer?

Inside the door, deafened by the howling mob of dancers and screamers, they appeared to meet, Illya and Mahyana. Two young people with mutual interests, ready for life.

Solo led them through the rocking room toward the first bandstand. Four young men with long hair gyrated, handling their electronic instruments perfectly. Above them in the cages the girls moved sinuously, their eyes closed, their young bodies moving in perfect rhythm with the beat of the music.

“Four,” Solo said. “Hardly a trio.”

Illya pointed out, “The sign on the stand says they are the Waif Wailers.”

“I hope that whatever PowerTen is, they don’t feed it to all of them here and send them after us,” Solo whispered.

“You have the most charming thoughts,” Illya said.

“Just what are we looking for?” Mahyana wanted to know.

“If we knew that, my dear, we wouldn’t have to look,” Solo said.

The beautiful brown-skinned girl smiled at solo. Illya sighed. He hoped that both Napoleon and Mahyana would remember that there was work to do, dangerous work. Illya grinned wryly. Perhaps he was just jealous. And perhaps he had a right to be. After all, he had seen the girl first. She had almost saved his life.

Solo whispered to Mahyana, “I think our Illya would prefer it if we tended to business.”

“It is hard to look into each other’s eyes and still look for trouble,” Illya said.

They had reached the next bandstand now. Five young men with beards sang and stamped, banged hard on their instruments. The sing on the bandstand read: The Beavers. The banjo man suddenly bent down.

“Daddy, you following me?”

Solo studied the bearded young man who grinned down at them from the bandstand. “Is this a friend of yours, Illya?”

“I would like you to meet Fighting Joe Hooker from Hoboken,” Illya said.

“You puttin’ me on, Dad?” Hooker said.

Mahyana smiled at the bearded boy. “Fighting Joe Hooker was an American Civil War general, Mr. Hooker. I think Mr. Kuryakin means it as a compliment.”

“I knew I should have finished kindergarten,” Joe Hooker said, and smiled at the pretty singer. “You brought the cool chick, Dad. That makes my night. Put away your weapons and sing a chorus, doll.”

“All right,” Mahyana said.

The girl climbed onto the bandstand with her fluid motion, the slim brown body hiding the muscle of an athlete. Illya and Solo circulated slowly, watching the room. Joe Hooker strummed his banjo, beating time, grinning at the girl as she sang. Illya nodded toward the other bandstands across the milling mob of teenage dancers.

“I see no riots, Napoleon. Perhaps they are not here tonight?”

“Then why did the doorman act as if they were?” Solo said without looking at Illya, his body keeping time as if the music were his only interest.

“I don’t know. Perhaps Mr. Hooker will tell us,” Illya said.

Solo nodded, snapping his fingers, his eyes studying the room. Everything seemed normal: the youngsters were dancing a storm, a bright happiness on all their faces. With the exveption of the doorman outside and some of the musicians, it did not look as though there was a person in the room over twenty years old.

“Nice, real nice,” Joe Hooker said as Mahyana finished her chorus and The Beavers took a breather. The bearded banjo man squatted down on the platform. “This moving is too much, Dad. Yesterday Kandaville, today Down Under, crazy.”

“Mr. Hooker,” Illya said.

“Joe, Dad, just Joe. Mister is for TV stars over fifty.”

“All right, Joe,” Solo said. “What can you tell us about The Bedlam Trio?”

“Local group. This is home base,” Hooker said, “Only—”

“Do they travel a great deal?” Illya broke in.

“No, man, they sit, you know? I mean, this is their pad. Only thing is, they—”

“Is there anything peculiar about them? Anything unusual,” Solo said.

“They’re on, Dad, if that’s what you mean.”

“On?” Illya said.

“Turned on, man—the pot, you know?”

“Marijuana?” Solo said.

“They smoke up a storm, and that’s kind of funny, you know? I mean, the new rock and roll boys don’t usually make that scene. They’re the only group I know, way out. Only, Dads, maybe you’ve got another sort of group in mind.”

“Why?” Solo snapped.

“Well, The Bedlam gang here ain’t a trio. They’re a quartet. See, over there.”

Illya, Solo and Mahyana turned quickly to look at the four muscular young men on the last bandstand across the dancing room. There were four- and they were also very strange looking. They wore black leather jackets, bulky jackets that could hide almost anything. But it was their eyes.

Solo whispered “Look at their eyes!”

“The same as in the pictures—maniacal,” Illya said.

“Are thinking what I’m thinking?” Solo whispered, his voice still smiling as if he was talking about nothing more important than the music.

“I am,” Illya said. “A trap. That ticket was left for me to find. It must be a standard booby trap, intended to bring anyone who captures or kills on of their men straight here.”

“I agree. And I think we are going to have trouble getting out,” Solo said.

“I would say a diversion is indicated,” Illya said.

“But we should talk to them, The Bedlams,” Solo said.

“Later would seem wiser,” Illya said.

“I agree,” Solo said.

The two agents spoke low and casually to Mahyana. The girl nodded her understanding. Joe Hooker squatted down again on the bandstand above them.

“If you’re interested, Dads, The Bedlam boys look mighty interested in you.”

The bearded banjo man nodded toward the far bandstand. The four muscular young men in the black leather jackets had put down their instruments and were looking toward Illya and Solo. Illya pointed to the doorman standing with them. Solo nodded.

“All right, now. Listen,” Solo said. “We’ll head for the door together. If they start to cut us off, I’ll drop a smoke bomb; that should shake this place up. When I do, make a run for the door. I’ll cover the rear.”

“Now!” Illya said.

The three agents started for the door. From the bandstand, the four leather-jacketed youths began to move to cut them off. Illya and Solo pushed the girl ahead of them. It looked for a moment that they would make it.

Then it happened.

From out of the hordes of dancing teenagers, single young men and girls began to appear—all wearing black leather jackets. The boys wore jackets and blue jeans, the girls the same jackets and tight stretch pants. They seemed to appear all through the room—and al their eyes had a steady, fixed, maniacal glaze. Eyes that were almost insane, yet happy, exhilarated.

“They’ve got us blocked off!” Solo said sharply. “If I throw the bomb it won’t stop them all.”

Illya looked around quickly.

The three agents had stopped now. They stood in the center of the room, surrounded by the wildly dancing young people, the bands beating a frenzied rhythm. Everywhere in the room the strange teenagers in the leather jackets seemed to come up out of the floor. Then there was a voice.

“Looks like you need the Paul Revere act again, Dads.”

Joe Hooker had come up to them.

“I know the back way. Make with the feet, fast!”

They nodded. Solo suddenly threw his bomb. Smoke billowed up in a great cloud in the room.

The screaming began.

Illya, Solo, and Mahyana followed Joe Hooker toward the rear, under the rear bandstand and crouched low, emerged into a concrete corridor.

Two black-jacketed teenagers appeared with guns at the far end of the corridor, their eyes blazing insane joy.

“This way,” Hooker cried.

Illya snapped off two quick shots from his Special at the two black jackets. The two did not even duck. But they did not fire; they just came forward at a trot. Illya turned and ran after the others.

They came out of a door into a dark parking lot. Behind them black-jacketed teenagers poured into the corridor like a boiling river. Now they began to howl like wild beasts on the trail of food.

The three agents raced across the parking lot, Joe Hooker with them.

Mahyana stumbled, fell.

Joe Hooker stopped to help her.

Another horde of teenagers, all in black jackets, poured around the corner of the building. Illya and Solo stopped for a second. Hooker and Mahyana were up again and running.

“They’re cut off!” Illya cried.

“We can’t help now; too many of them.”

“Run, Napoleon!” Illya cried.

Solo ran. Illya ran behind him. They reached the far side of the parking lot, where there were buildings and a street. Solo went around the corner of the first building, with Illya twenty yards behind him. Illya cried out.

“I’ll lead them off. They can see me.”

Solo did not pause. He knew that Illya was right. He, out in front, could turn the next the next building and be out of sight. The raging, howling mob behind was too close to Illya. The weird horde of black-jackets had already swarmed over Mahyana and Joe Hooker. One of them had to remain free.

Solo turned the corner. He was out of sight for a full thirty seconds.

Illya came around the corner, the mob in close pursuit.

Solo had vanished.

Smiling grimly, Illya ran on down the dark Sydney street. They were persistent, the teenagers behind him, not like a simple mob, but Illya was a trained athlete and he slowly pulled away. He ran on toward the outskirts of Sydney.

The mob poured after him.

For a long minute the dark street was filled with howling, raging black jackets. Ten teenagers forced Joe Hooker and Mahyana into a black car that appeared from nowhere. The street shook as the horde poured on after the fleeing Illya Kuryakin.

Then, suddenly, the street was empty again.

Nothing moved on the dark Sydney street under the Southern sky.

Then a manhole cover opened slowly. Napoleon Solo climbed out into the night. Alone, he listened for a moment, then turned and walked quickly away in the opposite direction.

TWO

The sun rose slowly over Sydney. In his hotel room, Napoleon Solo spoke urgently into the tiny radio set in his hand, the two threadlike antennae extended.

“Bubba, this is Sonny! Come in, Bubba. Report, Bubba. Come in, come in, this is Sonny.”

Solo pressed the receive button. There was only silence. He rubbed his chin. The set had a range of five miles on local transmission. Illya knew that Solo would be in the hotel. But Solo had been trying to raise the small Russian for hours. By now, if Illya had escaped the mob, he should have managed to make his way to within five miles of the hotel.

“Bubba, come in. Sonny is here, come in. Bubba?”

There was only silence.

Solo made a tiny adjustment on his miniature set and pressed the send button again.

“Anzac, this is Sonny. Come in.”

He pressed the receive button. Immediately a crisp female voice spoke.

“Sonny, this is Anzac Control.”

Solo spoke urgently to the girl at U.N.C.L.E. in Sydney. “Has Bubba called in?”

“No report from Bubba,” the crisp female voice said. “A report to the Sydney police detailed a riot at The Bedlam. Many hurt—no mention of Agents Kuryakin or Mahyana. The report stated that a musician, one Joseph Hooker, was missing.”

Solo thought for a moment. Then he pressed his send button again. “Overseas relay to New York, Section-I priority.”

“Immediately, Sonny,” Anzac control said.

Solo waited. The room had come to seem stifling now. Where was Illya? Had they caught him? And where were Mahyana and Joe Hooker? Dead—or just captured? There was one hope: THRUSH always tried to capture U.N.C.L.E. agents if it could.

Solo paced. Joe Hooker was of no use to THRUSH. Solo only hoped the bearded musician had the sense to let them think he was with U.N.C.L.E. It would be safer for now. Solo paced. Where was he to go from here? The only lead was The Bedlam, and with his escape they would have abandoned The Bedlam by now. He had to have a lead.

The tiny transmitter-sender wailed its undulating bell-like signal. He pressed the receiving button.

“Sonny, overseas relay from New York. Proceed.” Anzac control said.

“Are you there, Solo?” the familiar voice of Waverly said.

“Yes, I’m here, sir. Illya is missing. They have Agent Mahyana, African Section-II, and a musician named Hooker.”

The voice of Waverly showed no emotion. “Very well, Mr. Solo. Section-II, South Pacific, will conduct a search for Mr. Kuryakin. However, I think we must continue with our problem. I have a possile area of investigation for you.”

“Yes, sir,” Solo said. He did not protest. In the work of U.N.C.L.E., only the problem counted. The people were expendable—all, including Waverly, if that had to be.

“With the aid of South Pacific Section-II we have identified the suit worn by the council member N in your picture. A tailor in Sydney, one Max Booth, verifies that he made it. We do not wish to approach Booth for details with local people. So I think it should be in your hands.”

“Yes, sir,” Solo said.

The tiny set went silent. Solo looked at it for a moment. Then he went to work. His weapons in order, a clean suit on, he left the hotel and walked out into the Australian sun.

A simple check of the telephone directory showed that the shop of Max Booth was only a few blocks form the hotel clerk. The hotel clerk informed

Solo that Booth was a very good, if expensive, tailor.

Solo found the small, exclusive shop without incident. He walked in, the picture of the young executive looking for a suit. A small, wizened man hurried to him.

“Yes, sir?”

“I’d like a suit,” Solo said simply. The small man cocked his head. “American? May I ask how you heard of me?”

“Through a friend. He saw one of your suits on a man he met and liked it,” Solo said.

“You know this man who wore my suit?”

“No, but he was small, thin, about sixty, I’d say. My friend thought he was an industrial scientist, probably a chemist. They were at a chemical convention.”

“Ah,” Max Booth said. “Yes, small, thin, and a chemist. I made him a fine tweed.”

Solo nodded. “That was it, a good tweed. Just what I had in mind. What did you say his name was?”

“Fitzhugh, Marcus Fitzhugh,” Max Booth said. “A very wealthy man. One of my best customers. Ah, he’s a great man, is Mr. Fitzhugh.”

Max Booth turned and walked back toward a curtained fitting room.

“Tweed, you say? Well, perhaps we can suit you. Of course, it will take some weeks. I have a long list.”

Solo spoke to the tailor. “He has a strange voice, this Mr. Fitzhugh?”

The tailor stopped, turned. “Voice? Hardly, young man. Marcus Fitzhugh is a deaf-mute. Are you sure you have the right man?”

“I never met him, myself,” Solo said, but he was thinking of something else. A deaf-mute! Of course. No wonder they had no record in the files of that voice! A man like Marcus Fitzhugh was certainly in U.N.C.L.E.‘s files, but without a voice to cross-reference.

Marcus Fitzhugh never spoke in public, he had said that himself! No wonder. Now all he had to do was contact Waverly and run a check on

Marcus Fitzhugh. The man was sure to be in the files. All.

Solo looked up. The tailor was gone. His sixth sense was suddenly alert. It had been too easy. The tailor had told him too much. Why? To throw him off guard. It was a trap.

Solo whirled, half ran for the door. He reached the door and opened it. No one was in the shop or on the street. He pulled on the doorknob.

A puff of cool vapor struck his face.

Solo froze like a statue with his hand still on the doorknob. He could see, think, but he could not move.

* * *

Illya waited four hours in the dank cellar of the Sydney slum. The mob did not return. By the time Illya cautiously left the shelter of the cellar the sun was up over the city. He took out his miniature sender-receiver.

“Sonny, this is Bubba. Come in?”

He pressed the receive button. There was no response. Illya put his tiny set away. Napoleon had certainly gone back to the hotel if he had escaped. The hotel was out of range, and so was Anzac control from here.

Carefully, cleaning up his clothes as much as possible, he worked his way toward the center of Sydney. The people going to work stared at him. He knew he must look odd—a small blond man wearing a black shirt and tight black trousers all stained with mud.

To be sure, Illya took evasive action every time a long black car came near. He wondered about Mahyana and Joe Hooker. He felt angry about the innocent young musician. Still, they would probably be safe enough for now. THRUSH would want to `talk’ to them.

His progress was slow. The sun was halfway up the morning sky when he reached the range of the hotel. He took out his radio set again and raised the two threadlike antennae. He sat in a hidden doorway to be unobserved.

“Sonny, this is Bubba! Sonny, come in.”

Solo did not answer. Illya felt cold. He made the tiny adjustment on his set.

“Anzac, this is Bubba.”

The female voice was cool. `Bubba, Anzac control. Where are you?”

“Safe,” Illya said. “Have you heard from Sonny?”

“Yes, an hour ago. He was instructed by New York to proceed to Max Booth’s tailoring shop. Are you well?”

“As well as can be expected,” Illya said dryly. “Any word on Mahyana or Hooker?”

“None on Agent Mahyana. Hooker is reportedly missing.”

“No other word?”

“No. You are coming in? Arrange contact.”

“No,” Illya said grimly. “I am not coming in.”

He clicked off his set and went to the nearest telephone. He located the address of Max Booth’s shop. As fast as he could he walked toward the shop. The address was in range of his radio set, and Napoleon had not answered. Illya walked faster.

When he reached the street of Max Booth’s shop he stopped. The street was deserted. That was strange at this hour. Then he saw the policeman directing traffic away from the street. What had happened? Had something happened to Napoleon? He was about to approach the policeman when he saw the long black car drive up.

The policeman waved this one through!

Illya flattened back against the wall in the shadow, where he could see the street.

The black car glided to a halt in front of a shop. It was Max Booth’s tailor shop! Illya watched. Moments later, two men—a giant and a big, dark-haired man—came out of the tailor shop. Napoleon Solo walked between them.

Except that Napoleon was not walking. He was being carried by the two men—carried upright, rigid, like a statue carved out of stone.

Behind the two men, and the grotesque Solo, Illya saw a third man. This man was small, thin. The small man turned to look up and down the street.

Illya shuddered. The man’s face was only half a face—the left half was a mass of scars.

The three men pushed Solo into the black car, climbed in after him. The car turned and came back the way it had come. As it paused at the corner near Illya, the policeman who had been directing traffic, suddenly jumped into the car.

The car roared away.

But in the instant of pause to pick up the policeman, Illya had run quickly to a parked car. It was only a matter of seconds for the blond U.N.C.L.E. agent to press his small, round electronic circuit activator to the ignition. The car started with a roar.

Illya drove off in pursuit of the black car.

THREE

Solo was aware of all that was happening. He could see the giant shape of Gotz in the front seat, the man in police uniform driving. He could see the big, deep-voiced chief agent of THRUSH on his right, and the small, thin, horribly disfigured man on his left. The small man had not yet spoken, but solo knew that this was Council Member N—Marcus Fitzhugh, famous and respected scientist and industrialist.

He was aware of the barren land. It stretched all around the speeding car as far as the eye could see. Bleak, hot and dey, with twisted trees. Low sand hills, patches of tough grass, rocks and glaring clay. Here and there tall structures stood above the parched earth. They were, Solo guessed, the heads of mine shafts. This was Central Australia.

It looked more like the surface of Mars—deserted, barren, malignant.

He was aware of it, as he had been aware of the whole trip the thousand miles or more from Sydney. First the black car to a small airport, then the cargo aircraft with the car loaded right in it, then the hours of driving since they landed here in the center of nowhere—a nowhere that looked like the borders of hell. A dry, empty land like the white and glaring land around Green River, Wyoming.

He was aware of all of this, and of the fact that he was alone.

But he could neither speak nor move.

Rigid, propped upright in the seat, even the muscles of his eyes were frozen; he could see only what was directly in front of him. But his brain was as clear and active as ever, and he could hear.

Marcus Fitzhugh talked in that horrible hissing voice. “You see, Solo, your escape was only temporary. You have caused us far too much trouble. Because of you we have lost men, have had to close down two of our operational centers, and been put to all the inconvenience of chasing you. Such foolishness slows down my work.”

“It won’t slow us down long,” the deep-voiced chief agent said.

“Gotz has a score to settle with you, Mr. Solo.”

“First we learn what he knows,” Marcus Fitzhugh said. “And this time, Herarra, we must not fail. This time we have tall the time we need.”

“He won’t get out The Belly,” Herarra said. “Gotz will make him talk.”

“Just keep your monster in hand, Herarra. We want answers, not smashed bones—not at first,” Marcus Fitzhugh said.

Solo tried to move. He forced the orders from his clear brain to his muscles. He did not move a hair. His brain reeled with the effort. It was no use. The drug they had used rendered him totally rigid. He heard Marcus Fitzhugh laugh—a terrible sibilant sound like escaping air.

“I believe an eyelid actually twitched that time, Mr. Solo,” Fitzhugh said. “You are a remarkable man. I can’t remember when anyone managed even a hair twitch under that particular little drug of mine. Yes, a remarkable man. It is too bad. Our poor stupid Maxine was right. It is too bad you are U.N.C.L.E.”

The disfigured industrialist laughed his reedy hiss again. “But, I too am a remarkable man. The world failed to see that. Because I am disfigured, my larynx and vocal chords destroyed, they think I am only a freak. The fools!”

“The fools, they believe the accident in my laboratory not only made me a horror to look at, but a deaf-mute. And I wa mute. This voice you hear, terrible though it is, is a voice I created for myself. Yes, I build a new power of speech with plastic and metal. I can do as much for others, and I will when we of THRUSH rule this stupid world.”

“We must rule because we can rule. Have you read Plato? Of course you have. He was a genius. Only those who can rule should rule. The herd cannot rule. Look at what they have done? Stupid children are allowed to run free, to do as they want. What idiocy! Children, teenagers, must be shaped, told, commanded.”

Solo tried again. His brain commanded, cajoled, begged his muscles to move. It was no use. He could do nothing but listen to this madman, stare at

the back of Gotz's bull neck. The sight of the giant made him as afraid as he could be. He had seen the look in the pig eyes of the giant. Gotz would not forgive him for knocking him out. That blow would have killed anyone on earth except the giant.

Solo felt the car turn off the dirt road onto a smaller one. Clouds of dust rose in the hot Australian air. The car bucked and slewed, but Solo felt nothing. It was his hope. They would have to free him from this paralyzing drug to torture him. His only hope was that they would torture him, not kill him at once.

He strained again. Useless. Marcus Fitzhugh laughed his hissing laugh. Solo stared ahead beyond the bull neck of the giant to where the desolate countryside was visible as the car climbed a small hill. Sky and sand hills and glaring sun—a vast, empty desert. Not a stick of cover anywhere, only the tall mine shafts standing up against the blue sky.

This time they had searched him completely, removed everything except his clothes. If he ever got free, that would be their mistake. The thin thread of silicon carbide woven carefully into his trousers, saw edged and hard enough to cut all but a diamond. The loop of the same material, thin as hair, that was, in the hands of an expert, a deadly weapon, and that was sewn, woven into his jacket.

"Well, my dear Solo, here we are. There you see my true home. The Belly, they called it when there were people here. There are no people within two hundred miles, I saw to that. They called it The Belly, because that is what it is—a great belly inside the earth. NO hill, just flat earth, unseeable from the air or anywhere."

Solo saw it ahead. A shabby mine-shaft exactly like all the others they had passed. Yet there was a difference. To his trained

eye, the shabby shaft was not wood at all but metal. The dilapidated two by four hanging at the top was a radio antennae. The circular shaped bucket lift was a radar pickup.

There was nothing else as far as he could see except flat land—treeless, coverless, empty.

And he could guess that beneath the disguised mine shaft was the stronghold of Marcus Fitzhugh. Hidden in the bowels of a flat earth, with no clues as to its location from the land or sky—The Belly.

FOUR

To Illya Kuryakin, the desolate country looked like the arid deserts in the southern part of Siberia. He had been to that harsh area once on a job before he came to U.N.C.L.E., and he had thought then that there was no land on earth so abandoned, forgotten, like a piece of some distant and dead planet. But he had been wrong, this land was as utterly desolate and silent.

To follow them had been as difficult as it had been bizarre. First to the airport near Sydney, where he had managed to attach the directional signal device to the black car before it had been loaded into the giant cargo plane. Then, in the air, at the controls of the fast Beechcraft, maintaining contact by the directional signal and by radar.

Finally he had found a man at the bush airport, where they had landed, who had a battered jeep—for a price.

Now he drove along the dusty road, with the very faint cloud of dust from the black car far ahead. He drove much too far behind them to be detected, following his directional signal. Grimly he continued the long chase, awaiting only the chance to move in with some hope of success.

There had been time in Sydney only to report the description of the small man with the disfigured face. After Sydney, the distance had become too great, and there had been no time anyway. Only at the bush airport had he managed to leave a message-a carefully coded message locating where he was, that would be telephoned to U.N.C.L.E. Headquarters in Sydney.

There was nothing more he could do now but follow the black car, check his weapons, and hope.

The distant, faint dust cloud continued to move steadily across the vast and deserted land. The glare of the sun reflected as if from water. Nothing at all moved in the land, not an animal, not a lizard.

Illya had not seen a human being or a house since leaving the bush airport-and they had been driving all day. At least a hundred and fifty miles had been covered already without a trace of human life or habitation.

The sun itself was low in the sky when, at last, the signal on his direction finder told him that the black car had turned off the dusty main road. Illya slowed down. If they were looking for pursuers it would be now that they would leave a man to check. From the aspect of the countryside, he guessed that any vehicle would be suspect, it was that deserted.

He drove ahead very slowly, letting the car move on ahead of him. The beep of the direction signal showed that the car ahead was proceeding slowly and at right angles to the road they had been travelling. The only danger was that it would move out of range before he found the side road, but he did not think that was likely at the speed it was maintaining now.

Then the car ahead stopped.

Illya stopped, leaned down to listen closely to his direction finder. There was no doubt, the signal was no longer moving. The black car had stopped somewhere less than ten miles ahead. Illya started the jeep and moved on very slowly. Then he stopped again. There was no sense in taking chances by becoming too hasty. The sun was low; he could wait for night. And he would avoid the road ahead if he could.

He got out of the battered jeep. He took out the small box of the miniature direction finder all U.N.C.L.E. field agents carried disguised as a box of wooden matches. With the small box in his left hand and his U.N.C.L.E. Special, loaded, cocked and ready in his right hand, he left the jeep and the road and started out across the hot land.

There was no cover, but he did not think they would look for a man on foot. In any case, it was a chance he had to take. The open, completely empty aspect of the country worked for him as well as against him. There were no high hills, no trees, no cover of any kind for an observer. There were only low, flat rises bare on top, and shallow gullies that might once have contained water.

He moved ahead, taking advantage of every gully, every hollow. It was slow work, and the last rays of sun beat down on his bare head. Already the air was growing chill. He stumbled ahead, his head broiling in the sun, his body beginning to feel the chill of the approaching night.

The sun was like a copper disk sitting on the horizon of the yellow land when Illya topped a low rise and saw it ahead. He dropped to his face at once. Slowly, then, he raised his head to look again. He rolled behind a small boulder and looked.

It was a shaft-head, like all the others he had passed, but not quite like them. His trained eye detected the radio antenna, the radar disk, the solidity of the seemingly broken down building.

And the black car was parked in front.

As he watched, the man in the policeman's uniform appeared from out of the shaft-head and walked to the car. The car moved off and vanished behind the building. Illya waited for it to appear on the other side. It did not. He backed off down below the crest of the small rise, circled, and looked again.

There was nothing behind the shaft-head. The car had vanished.

Illya bent to his direction finder. It was still operating, the faint bee-beep-bee-beep showing that the car was close by, even though he could not see it. He crawled back down into the hollow behind the small rise to wait for the night.

Night came in this barren land as it came to all deserts, suddenly and completely. One moment there was light and the last heat of the day; the next instant there was only darkness and the rising cold chill of the night.

Illya checked his weapons; the Special, his small bombs, the camera, his tiny radio, the thermite foil in his shoe, the special belt, and all the other miniature devices that made all U.N.C.L.E. agents walking arsenals.

Then he stood up and moved off in the night.

He reached the shaft-head without incident. There was no guard above ground. He found the disguised elevator. It looked exactly like an abandoned shaft elevator, but Illya touched its walls and found them solid steel.

It was locked. In the night he considered. He could break into the elevator, but there were probably alarms. Anyway, the operation of the elevator would certainly be noticed.

He went back out of the shaft-head and began to search the area in a wide circle, his infra-red flashlight revealing the ground but not revealing his presence. At last he found what he wanted-a cleverly disguised inspection ladder which ran down the inside wall of the elevator shaft. With a deep breath, moving slowly, he started to climb down.

He lowered himself a long distance. At last he felt the in-rush of cool air. It was probably an air-conditioning intake, which meant that he had to leave the shaft before he reached the air conditioning unit, which evidently fed into the passage. At the first cross duct, he turned and crawled until he found a frill. He burned the grill off, and dropped down.

He stood in a darkened corridor of steel. Far off he heard the sound of machinery. He bent to his direction finder. The signal was strong from the left. He moved cautiously to his left. He heard and saw no one. Whoever operated this hidden center was highly confident.

Illya smiled. They would find that even here in the center of nowhere, they were not safe.

The signal grew stronger.

He rounded a corner carefully and saw an opening ahead. There was a faint light inside. The car must be inside the opening. Illya moved carefully. He reached the opening and looked in.

He saw a bare room with a single tiny spotlight.

In the center of the bare steel floor, in a small circle of bright light, was a tiny object. Illya stared at it and froze.

The object was his tiny directional signal device!

It lay there, the only object in the bare room.

A hand clamped on his neck. A giant hand. He twisted. A second hand gripped his waist as if he were no bigger than a toothpick. Other hands worked swiftly, stripping him. He was held there naked while something was passed over his body-a metal detector. Helpless and naked, he waited.

Then he was flung forward. He lay on the floor beside his directional signal. His clothes were flung after him, shirt, trousers, and belt, all searched.

The small spotlight went out.

“Welcome, Mr. Kuryakin,” a horrible inhuman voice hissed. “Rest now. You can join your friends later.”

And the hissing laugh chilled the darkness.

ACT IV: A POWER OF TEN

ONE

The loud machinery pounded somewhere all night. It seemed to pound in Illya Kuryakin's brain. He dreamed of witches and giant hands. He floated helpless in a cauldron of blinding sun and empty dark.

When he opened his eyes he saw that he was not alone. Nor was he lying down in the room where he had been caught.

"Hello, Illya," Solo said. "Welcome to the club."

They were all standing against the walls, one in the center of each wall. They were shackled to the walls, spread-eagled, wrists and ankles shackled. Illya faced Napoleon Solo across the room. Mahyana stood pale against the wall to Illya's left. Joe Hooker was shackled to the wall to Illya's right.

"We seem to be caught," Illya said, still half stupefied.

Joe Hooker looked sad. "Man, I thought you could run faster. When I stopped for the chick, they put me away."

A voice seemed to come from the ceiling. The hissing voice of Marcus Fitzhugh.

"Mr. Hooker, I truly regret your part in this. I realize now that you were merely a helpful American. But, alas, it is too late. You must, I fear, share the fate of your Uncles."

Illya looked up at the ceiling. "Please, spare us the bad jokes. We have troubles enough."

"Of course, Mr. Kuryakin," Marcus Fitzhugh said.

The small, disfigured man had suddenly appeared inside the steel room. They all blinked. A door in the wall had opened and closed so quickly they had not seen it. Marcus Fitzhugh was not smiling. His hissing voice came seriously.

“I apologize. No jokes, no sadistic toying with helpless victims. And I will not reveal all you need to know about PowerTen. Those movie villains are so ridiculous, aren’t they? Who knows-you might still escape, and then wouldn’t I seem foolish?”

“You understand the program ahead, I’m sure. You all have knowledge we can use—Mr. Hooker excepted, of course. We will torture you, until you tell us or die. That is it. Naturally, we will try to keep you alive as long as possible, but we are only human.”

“You will die whether you tell us or not. It is really only a matter of pain. We have drugs; we shall try to break down your conditioning. Miss Mayhana may not be conditioned, my agent Herrara tells me. And I will not insult either her or your gentlemen by suggesting you talk to spare her pain. I think we are all aware that the stakes are far too high for chivalry. Miss Mahyana, I’m sure, knew what she was getting into when she joined you.”

“So, that is the schedule. It begins at once. First, experts want to study your pain thresholds, so we can make an intelligent working schedule. For that, you will all go together this time, Mr. Hooker excepted. You will only be killed, Mr. Hooker.”

Joe Hooker said, “How do I thank you, let me count the ways. Is the creepy one for real?”

“I’m afraid he is very much for real, Joe,” Illya said.

Marcus Fitzhugh did not answer either of them. The small, disfigured man with the metal and plastic voice had vanished through the same swift and silent secret door. There was a silence in the steel room.

Suddenly, as if pushed, flung down, all four prisoners fell forward to the steel floor. The chains had been removed by some remote control. There was a sharp rattling sound as the shackles scraped the walls, steel against steel.

From where they lay, their muscles cramped from the long chaining, the four prisoners watched as the shackles and chains vanished into the walls.

Illya stood up. He had been chained the shortest time and he was not numbed like the others. He crossed to where the shackles had been. There

was nothing but smooth walls. His slender fingers could feel no trace of a break. He crossed the room to where he thought the door was. The wall was smooth, unbroken, not a hairline crack.

“Excellent engineering,” Illya said.

“Excellent methods,” Solo said. “Not even a guard to unshackle us and give us a chance to jump him. All done with mirrors.”

“Electronics and complicated engineering,” Illya said. “And what is complicated is easiest to sabotage. It is typical of THRUSH to equate complexity with efficiency and progress. Of course, they have us under surveillance and voice monitoring. Is that not so, Mr. Fitzhugh?”

It was the deep voice that answered. “Quite true, Kuryakin. And I don’t think you will sabotage us. Mr. Fitzhugh is preparing for you now. I’m sure Gotz will enjoy another meeting with Solo.”

Silently the hidden door slid open. They waited, the four prisoners, but nothing happened. Then the voice of Herrara came again.

“Step out, except Hooker.”

They looked at each other.

“Come on,” Herrara’s voice said impatiently. “We can prod you, but why make it hard? You might as well walk where we tell you.”

Illya shrugged. “Why not? Come.”

The three agents stepped through the door, which instantly closed behind them, shutting off Joe Hooker. But the door did not close fast enough to stop the bearded boy’s gallant parting message.

“Stay loose, Dads,” Joe Hooker said.

Then they were alone in a long silent corridor. They walked ahead. As they neared the end of this corridor another door slid open. They passed through, and the door closed behind them. Smoothly and simply they were forced along corridors by doors that opened and closed. The steel corridors were smooth and doorless. They were under constant scrutiny. At last they entered a series of corridors that were different.

“Keep walking,” Herrara’s voice said.

They had seen no human being, nothing they could attack even with bare hands. Herded by opening and closing doors, watched on closed-circuit television, they marched now in corridors that reminded them of U.N.C.L.E. Headquarters. There were doors, windowless and smooth, but marked with small metal plaques. Casually, Illya looked at the plaques on the doors.

At last, after what seemed like a walk of a mile in the maze of corridors, a door opened and they saw the figure of the giant Gotz standing before them.

TWO

There were three men in the torture room. The giant, Gotz, and two smaller men in white coats. All around the walls were the instruments of torture—some old, like a simple hot iron glowing white in its brazier, some new, like a simple square box with electrodes for the temples.

Gotz was grinning, his eyes fixed on Napoleon Solo. One of the men in white stared at Illya, and the third man seemed to wet his puffy lips as he watched Mahyana enter the room. The voice of Marcus Fitzhugh came over the loudspeaker.

“Now we will learn about your pain levels,” Fitzhugh said. “The three men who will, ah, accommodate you, have been very carefully chosen. Gotz, of course, will enjoy his work on Solo. The man staring at Kuryakin is a former Soviet scientist Mr. Kuryakin was involved in exiling in his early days. The third man takes particular pleasure in handling women, especially pretty ones. Proceed, gentlemen.”

Gotz stepped forward, his huge hands reaching for Napoleon Solo.

“Now,” Solo snapped.

With a leap, turn and karate cry, Solo delivered a perfect karate kick to Gotz’s stomach. The giant doubled over, but did not fall. Solo smashed an elbow thrust into the giant’s face. Gotz staggered. Breathing heavily now, Solo kicked the giant where it would hurt the most. Gotz screamed, doubled over.

Solo smashed the giant down with a two-handed blow to the back of the neck. The giant rested on hands and knees, trying to rise. Solo kicked him on the point of the chin. The bull neck gave way with a loud, sickening snap, and Gotz collapsed.

While Solo had been struggling with the giant, Illya had disposed of his man with a single thrust to the throat. Mahyana had handled her man with a judo throw, hurling the startled sadist against a wall.

The attack had taken seconds, but already Marcus Fitzhugh was shouting. “Guards! Go in! You stupid fools! How can you escape? Guards!”

The door opened.

As if this were a signal they had been waiting for, Illya and Solo leaped to either side of the door. Their actions were quick, smooth, and automatic, with no need to have planned it with talk.

The guards ran in. Two guards armed with machine-pistols. Solo chopped one. Illya tripped the other, kicked him in the face as he tried to rise. Mahyana had the two guns. They were through the door just before it closed.

“The left corridor,” Illya cried out.

Mahyana handed one machine-pistol to Solo.

Marcus Fitzhugh was shouting. “They are out! Blue alert!”

Alarms clanged.

“Where are we going?” Mahyana gasped.

“There is always an Achilles’ heel,” Illya said. “I know where it is.”

Four guards appeared. Solo and Mahyana shot them down. The girl took a bullet that creased her shoulder, drawing quick blood. Illya had reached a door they had passed earlier.

The Russian tore at his belt-the belt they had left him when they took all they thought was a weapon. He tore off a piece of the belt, pulled a thread on the edge and shouted.

“Back, flat down!”

They fell to the floor. A shattering explosion shook the steel corridor. The door in front of them blew open with the force of the powerful explosive. The special belt was an explosive in itself, fused by the threads at the edge. The three agents were up and through the door.

Mahyana stared at the small, closet-like room that seemed totally empty. “There’s nothing in here! What-?” she cried.

Illya smiled. The Russian pointed to a large box against the wall. Metal conduit went in and out of the box. Thick sheaves of conduit like bundles of

spaghetti.

“The main circuit box, fuses and all. The place is all electric, and this is the Achilles’ heel.”

Illya Kuryakin took the rest of his belt, wrapped it over the metal box, and pulled the thread. He pushed Solo and Mahyana out into the corridor again.

Marcus Fitzhugh’s voice hissed savagely. “There they are, Corridor 72, all.”

The explosion seemed to burst their eardrums, shattering the steel walls, shaking the floor beneath them.

Then all was suddenly quiet.

Illya and Solo raised their heads.

The alarms had stopped. The voice on the loudspeaker had been cut off. The noise of air-conditioning machinery ceased. The underground complex was as silent as a tomb.

“And blind,” Illya said. “All their power is off. Now they are deaf and blind, no better than we.”

“Look!” Solo said.

All down the corridors doors stood open. Illya laughed.

“I expected that. The doors are spring loaded and open when the power is off.”

“All the doors are open?” Mahyana said.

“I’m sure of it. Now, all we have to do is evade the guards. First we leave this corridor. Our position is reported. I don’t imagine they have many guards, they would rely on their electronic devices in this wilderness.”

They moved quickly and silently until they had put three other corridors between them and the point of the explosion. They had seen no one, but they could hear voices somewhere. Illya faced Mahyana.

“I think the main elevator shaft is straight ahead. It will be out of order, but there will be a cable to climb. They will expect us to break out. That is your job, Mehyana. Go up the cable, try to reach the surface.”

“And you?” Mahyana said.

“We came here for a reason,” Solo said. “We can’t leave without trying to find out what PowerTen is.”

“But.” the girl said.

“No but, my dear,” Illya said. “We have to try.”

The brown-skinned girl nodded and turned without another word. She slung the machine-pistol over her shoulder, and entered the open door of the elevator shaft. Then she was gone.

“This way, I think, Napoleon,” Illya said. “The sound of machinery has to be the manufacturing area and it is this way.”

The two agents moved silently along the corridors. Twice they encountered pairs of armed guards. They killed them quickly and simply with bursts from the machine-pistols. They had five machine-pistols now.

At last they came to their goal. A great cavern was hollowed out beneath high steel walkways. Complex chemical equipment stood silent, motionless below. Men down there moved frantically trying to make repairs.

Illya located the office and laboratory. They shot down the three guards there. Solo laid all the machine-pistols on the floor beside the open door.

“Go ahead,” Solo said. “I’ll hold them off when they come. Mahyana will lead them off for a time, but they’ll be back.”

Solo lay on the floor, the machine-pistols ready. Illya began to search the office laboratory.

All was silent in the vast underground complex called The Belly.

Until the voice hissed, “I admire you, gentlemen. Perhaps you cold have escaped.”

Marcus Fitzhugh stood in the room, a Luger in his hand. He stood there behind Solo, facing Illya. Behind him Herrara held Mahyana. There were two other guards behind them. They all stood before an opening in the office wall that had not been there.

“You see, Mr. Kuryakin, not all our little secrets were operated on the main power lines. I was aware of our weak spot. I prepared a small circuit of secret corridors on standby power. It seems I was wise. You will now please stand closer together, and do not attempt to reach those weapons.”

Fitzhugh smiled again, his horrible burned face twisting with a certain admiration. His hissing voice spoke quietly.

“You will be killed at once, of course. But such devotion to duty deserves the reward of knowledge. You want to know about PowerTen? Very well, I will tell you.

THREE

Solo and Illya stood there and looked at each other as they heard the nature of PowerTen.

“So you see, it is really a very interesting substance. Once ingested it will raise any neurotic impulse to a power of ten-ten time the urge, the obsession, the drive of a normal neurosis. Think of it! I can see that Mr. Kuryakin understands the chemical data I have outlined, but for Mr. Solo and Miss Mahyana let me simplify. Like all alkaloids, say, marijuana or peyote, it induces a state of heightened hysteria. However, unlike anything else known, it has the effect of hypnosis—it can be directed. Under its influence, a man can be made to do what he is instructed, mindlessly and without fear or hesitation, provided the tendency was already there. For example, if some young man, obviously neurotic and disturbed by the power structure of our foolish world, is given PowerTen he will kill a political leader he only wanted to defy before he took the drug. You see the implications? All we have to do is locate young people with the neurotic desire to defy, steal, attack, rebel, destroy, give them PowerTen—and tell them to do what they desire. They will do it!”

Illya nodded slowly. “Happily, without remorse or hesitation. They will feel exhilarated.”

“Precisely!” Marcus Fitzhugh said eagerly. “And certain subjects can even be directed to do specific acts, as you well know from our recent results with the African president, the gold theft, the laboratory fire, and the deputy chief.”

“Certain subjects?” Solo said.

Fitzhugh frowned, his grotesque face distorted. “At present the drug is still under development. You see, at the moment it will only work on the young, the teenagers. That is because older people have more resistance. They are under longer social conditioning. They subconsciously resist the

effects of the drug. But the young! Ah, they are so eager, so vulnerable, they have not had the time to become emotionally cautious."

"The tendency must be there?" Illya said. "Then that."

"Explains the suicides, the mad swimming out to sea, of course," Fitzhugh said. "The drug is still in its early stages. WE hav eto experiment. When we gave it to those young people it heightened their self destructive desire and they acted."

"And the black-jackets, the mob in New York?" Solo said. "This must be your great."

"They are our triumph," Fitzhugh hissed in his un-human artificial voice. "I call them my teen corps. All are perfectly controlled subjects, as long as they get their dosage of PowerTen. They do exactly as we tell them. We find one in a hundred like that, and they are my pride. Once under the drug, they are my tools. You see, PowerTen is also an addictive drug!"

The disfigured genius laughed, "Like marijuana the drug can be ingested by smoking, by chewing, or by injection. Think of it, gentlemen! A drug that will enslave some, cause many to run wild and do what they only had a tendency to do before, cause others to destroy themselves with a smile! A drug which can be distributed in cigarettes, in chewing gum! All the eager, vulnerable young of the world, the unformed teenagers—they will be in our hands, and we will rule the earth with them! A world where we own the souls of all the young people!"

Illya shuddered in the silent office. Solo's hands twitched as if to reach out and strangle the evil genius with the un-human voice. A world of teenagers addicted to a drug controlled by THRUSH! THRUSH would be destroyed by their own suicidal hands under its baleful influence.

"Conceived of it—all teenagers a weapon of THRUSH!" Marcuc Fitzhugh said. "Ruined, destroyed, rendered into mindless weapons who are happy when they kill and destroy! We will own them all! And I, Marcus Fitzhugh, will rule the council of THRUSH because PowerTen is my work, my secret! They are mine, the teenagers of the world."

At that instant the noise suddenly began again. The machinery below began to hum; alarms began to ring. Herrara walked to a box on the wall of the office and opened it to pull a switch and shut off the alarms. The power lines had been repaired.

Fitzhugh seemed to relax, his eyes calming and turned on Solo and Kuryakin. He raised his Luger.

This time the new voice spoke from behind the two guards holding Mahyana.

“Dad, you forgot one little teenager. Man, that was a real boo-boo.”

Fitzhugh whirled, an automatic reaction.

The bearded face of Joe Hooker stood behind the two guards. Hooker leaped on the two guards. Mahyana threw one of them. Herrara, caught at the control box, was attacked by Solo. Illya went for the back of Fitzhugh.

But the disfigured insane genius recovered himself. Before Illya could reach him, he fired at Joe Hooker. Hit, the bearded boy was knocked over backwards.

Fitzhugh leaped forward, kicked Mahyana out of his path, and hurtled through the open door, which instantly closed behind him. The disfigured man was safe inside his emergency corridors.

Illya swore softly. The rest of the enemy had been subdued. Solo stood now, holding a machine-pistol. Mahyana stood up, blood still on her shoulder, a dark bruise on hr pretty face where Fitzhugh had kicked. Joe Hooker lay on the floor.

“Like, Dads, he got me some.”

“Where?” Illya said, bending over the bearded boy.

“Nowhere, man, like the shoulder. It smarts, you know, like it was crazy. There I was in that box looking to meet the big banjo man and Shazam, the door opened! I split but quick, you know? All the doors was open, and they just plain forgot about little Joe. I saw them taking the chick down some little passageways. I followed, and they never remembered. Crazy.”

“Crazy,” Illya said. “Can you walk?”

“If I can’t, I’ll fly. Man, let’s split this scene!”

Solo had walked out to the steel walkway above the vast cavern of chemical machinery. Now he called out.

“Look!”

Below, on the floor of the vast chemical plant, Marcus Fitzhugh was shouting to the workers, waving his arms wildly. AS one man, the workers began to run in a howling mob behind Fitzhugh.

They were running for the stairways up toward the office.

FOUR

Illya ran back to the control box Herrara had used to shut off the alarms. Quickly he pulled a switch and whirled.

“I’ve opened all the doors again. Run for the elevator as fast as you can. I don’t know how much time we’ll have.”

“Go!” Solo commanded.

Solo helped Joe Hooker along the walkway and into the first corridor. Mahyana came behind them. All the doors were open again.

In the control office and laboratory, Illya bent over a console of dials and gauges. He studied the labels for a moment, then quickly turned four dials to full open. The needles on the dials that controlled the process in the vast cavern began to climb toward the red danger areas.

Illya ran after the others.

The first wave of workers was coming up the stairs from the factory floor below. Illya squeezed off a volley from the machine-pistol he carried.

The first four men screamed and fell back against those behind. Somewhere the hissing voice of Marcus Fitzhugh was shrieking in mad anger, forcing the workers on.

Illya raced down the corridors after the others. Two guards appeared in his path and he shot them down, their shots going wild above his head. Illya ran on over them without looking down. The mob of workers was crowding into the narrow steel corridor behind him.

An explosion somewhere behind on the floor of the cavern rocked the corridor. One of the pieces of equipment had gone up. Illya reached the elevator. He turned to fire one more burst before jumping into the elevator-and saw the thick cloud of greenish-yellow gas flowing along the narrow and windowless corridor.

Caught like rats in a narrow sewer, the mob of workers began to scream, to choke, as the gas flowed over them. The narrow corridor was like a long

gas chamber.

Illya leaped into the elevator.

Solo closed the door and the elevator began to rise quickly.

Below them they could hear the screams and groans of the mob caught in the deadly gas from the exploded chemical equipment. Another explosion rocked the elevator shaft. The elevator slowed, hesitated, then surged upward. Moments later they were at the top. They stepped out into the fake shaft-head. It was daylight out in the world.

Joe Hooker slumped to the ground in the glaring sun.

Mahyana bent over, trying to catch a breath.

Another explosion shook the earth.

Below, faint and horrible, the screams and groans rose up to the sunlight from the bowels of the earth.

Illya pulled at Joe Hooker. “Hurry. I don’t know how long we have before it all blows. That gas can still reach us.”

“Lead on kindly light,” Hooker said.

Staggering in the blazing heat of the sun, the four beaten, disheveled refugees from the pit below moved across the desolate land, away from the disguised shaft-head. Every few yards the ground shook, heaved to explosions far below.

The screams of the dying continued to reach faintly to the surface. Streamers of greenish-yellow gas seeped up out of the elevator shaft behind them.

They reached the first low rise from where Illya had first spied on The Belly. The sun blazed down. There was not a breath of wind. Mahyana, her shoulder bleeding again, the bruise on her face swollen, ugly, sagged to the ground. Hooker fell and lay there in the broiling sun.

“Can’t we rest?” Mahyana gasped.

“Well, perhaps we are far enough, perhaps for a second or two we.”

Illya stopped. He and Solo stood there on the small rise of arid burning land and looked back to the fake shaft-head.

Impossibly, unbelievably, four figures had emerged from the towering shaft-head, had come up somehow from the holocaust below. The four wore gas masks and carried guns.

Even as Solo and Illya watched, prepared to battle the last attack, one of the figures tore off its mask and stood shaking its fist crazily toward them.

Marcus Fitzhugh stood in the sun and cursed the men who had destroyed his work.

It was the last gesture of his life.

There was a shuddering heave of earth. Illya and Solo were knocked down.

Then the earth seemed to raise up under the blazing sun.

The tower of the shaft-head leaned, crashed down in a shower of debris.

Heaved once more in a mammoth shuddering surge.

And collapsed.

Far off, the echo of the underground explosion reverberated through the sunny sky, bounced off the low sand hillocks, rolled away into the vast distance.

A great gaping hole lay before the eyes of the four prisoners who had escaped-a hole that still shivered and shook in the sun. All trace of the four enemies who had managed to come after them was gone. Marcus Fitzhugh would do no more work for anyone, unless it was for the devil.

From the gaping hole that was the only visible sign of the holocaust below, streams of gas seeped, lying heavy to the ground in the windless land.

“We had better move on,” Illya said at last.

Solo helped Joe Hooker to his feet.

They staggered off in the blazing sun toward the distant road. Illya was not surprised to find his Jeep gone.

After a while, they lost track of everything-everything but the endless miles and the searing sun. They staggered on, falling, getting up to stagger

again. There was no water, no food. They had not eaten for a day. As far as their burning eyes could see there was nothing but emptiness.

“How long can we last, Dads?” Joe Hooker said.

“We’ll last,” Solo said.

“Don’t put me on, Dad. I know. There isn’t a living cat within two hundred miles, that hissing nut told me,” Hooker said. “We’ll never make two hundred miles.”

“We will make it,” Illya said.

“Leave me, Dads. I can’t help no more. When you get back you can give me a medal. I always wanted a medal. One thing, like who’ve I been working for? I mean, who’s the leader, Dads?”

“U.N.C.L.E.,” Solo said. “But you’ve really worked for the whole world.”

“You had better leave me, too,” Mahyana said. “I can help Joe, and I slow you down. Get out and get help. We’ll try to stay alive.”

Illya and Solo looked at each other. They knew that Hooker and Mahyana were right. Only Solo and Illya, trained and uninjured, could hope to make it out of this endless desert. And then the hope was slim. They had done their work, but was this the end?

“It will be very cold soon,” Illya said. “Lie close together for the warmth. Move slowly, but keep moving as long as you can.”

“Crazy,” Hooker said, smiling weakly.

Mahyana suddenly stared upward at the glaring blue of the sky. Solo whirled. The helicopter seemed to slide sideways in the sky. They all stood and watched with their mouths open as the helicopter touched gently down not fifty yards away. A man stepped out and walked toward them.

Alexander Waverly said, “I see you accomplished your mission. I suggest we all leave this area without delay. I think the Australian people can clean up the miserable remains.”

“Yes, sir,” Solo said. “But how—”

Waverly tapped at his empty pipe. “I began to wonder about that Max Booth tailoring establishment. It seemed too simple. When I arrived in Sydney, Mr. Kuryakin’s message was there. It was not too hard to identify Marcus Fitzhugh from the description.”

“And you got my message about where we were?” Illya said.

“No, I’m afraid the man you entrusted that to was one of their men. However, the Australians managed to locate this particular piece of Fitzhugh’s property. He owned it in his own name. THRUSH can sometimes be so careless, almost arrogant. Now, shall we return to Sydney? Miss Mahyana is needed in Africa, I believe.”

The owl-eyed U.N.C.L.E. leader turned and walked calmly back to the helicopter. Solo helped Joe Hooker. The bearded boy was staring after Waverly.

“Like, crazy,” Joe Hooker said. The bearded youth was in bad shape, but he could still manage a wan smile.

Looking at him, Illya nodded.

The forces of evil, all over the world, could do their damndest, he was thinking. But for every weakling they seduced, every poor unfortunate they trapped, the essential decency in mankind was bigger, stronger than all of them. In the end, it would have to destroy them.

It was a good thought. It would help to make bearable the memory of the unspeakable hours that had passed.

After a while, the taut nightmare memories left Hooker and he could sleep.

The helicopter took off, circling once over the gaping hole in the vast wasteland that still steamed fingers of gas into the sky. Already, helicopters were below as men in gas masks approached the stronghold and factory of Marcus Fitzhugh.

“THRUSH will need a new member of council, it seems,” Waverly said. “Unfortunately, we need a new chief enforcement agent for Section-II, Africa. Would that appeal to you, Miss Mahyana?”

“Yes, sir, and thank you,” the lithe brown girl said.

“We will have to watch for the remains of the teen corps,” Illya said, his Russian mind still on the problem. “They will be very sick without their PowerTen.”

“The hospitals have been alerted, and the police,” Waverly said grimly.

“What about Maxine Trent?” Solo asked.

“Her body was found in the river,” Waverly said, looking for his tobacco in his old tweed suit. “But I have my doubts it was really her, Mr.—uh—Solo.”

Solo smiled. He had his doubts that Maxine would be ended so easily. He thought he would probably meet her again. Strangely, the thought did not displease him, deadly though she certainly was. A little danger was always interesting. And Maxine Trent was born for danger.

“You know, The Beavers are going to seem mighty square after you swingers,” Joe Hooker said. “I mean, crazy.”

The helicopter whirled off toward the jet that waited for them at the bush airport.

THE END

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